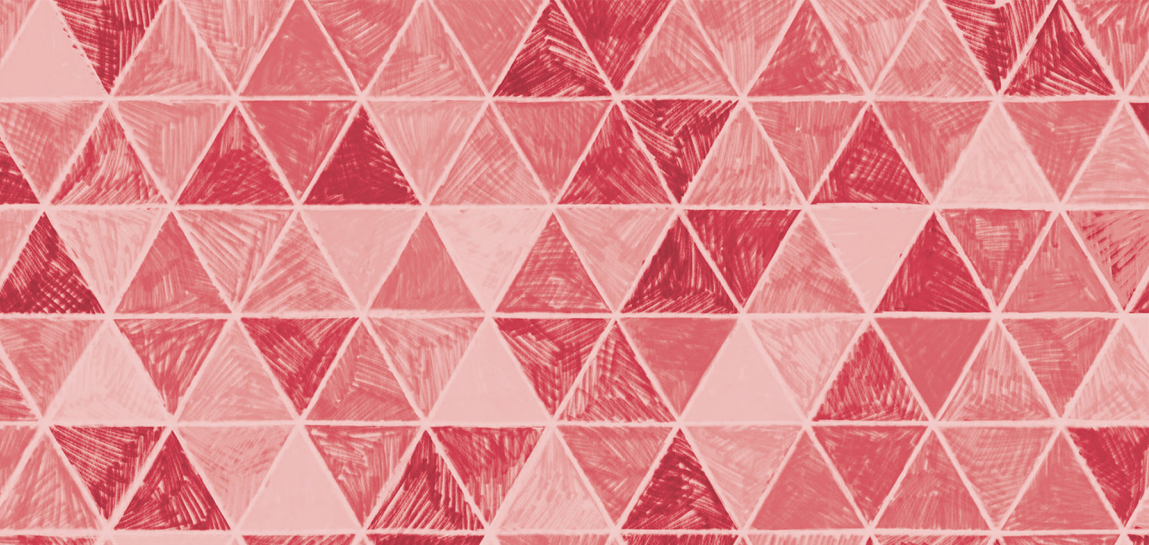




GUERRILLAS AND COMBATIVE MOTHERS

**WOMEN AND THE ARMED STRUGGLE IN SOUTH
AFRICA**

Siphokazi Magadla



UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL PRESS





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Guerrillas and Combative Mothers



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Guerrillas and Combative Mothers

Women and the Armed Struggle in South Africa

Siphokazi Magadla

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NATIONAL INSTITUTE
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To my mother, Zodwa Tom Magadla, the last-born of Nozici Tom



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Foreword

There may be some readers like me who have become skeptical or even irritated about books written by academics or researchers, mainly white and mostly over 40, on the role and contribution of women in the liberation struggle, especially in the armed struggle. Some authors have written from a position of 'knowing it all' or cynicism. Some deliberately, or by default, misrepresent, undermine, undervalue, devalue and even try to erase the contributions of these women. It may be that some of the events or stories did not fit snugly with the accepted theories or beliefs about the capacities, capabilities and agency of women, be they girls or mothers. Or perhaps they least understood the multiple, complex, layered and intersecting fronts in which women had to struggle against national oppression and simultaneously transform patriarchal relations through and within the liberation struggle. Regrettably, to date, women in the liberation and armed struggle still have to fight not only to be recognised or celebrated but just to be respected.

Other academics, particularly young African feminists like Professor Siphokazi Magadla, are emerging and helping these women tell their stories in their own words and in the way they experienced liberation and armed struggle and the transition into life in a 'democratic, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa'. *Guerrillas and Combative Mothers: Women and the Armed Struggle in South Africa* is not only a must-read for all of us but also a clarion call for those who lived these experiences to tell their stories, not for the sake of recording the past but to assist us, especially future generations, to build a better society. This well-written, well-researched and theoretically balanced book is but a small window into the lives of many women whose stories are still locked in. Some may

be unable to tell their stories or are not ready or afraid to open wounds that may not be healed.

In her book, Magadla asks for more research to be done. While I agree, it will be important to be deliberate about who is researched, who researches and when the research is done, especially as time is not on our side. The youngest woman recruit into MK in exile was seventeen in 1989. It is owed to our country and to the world in our commitment to build a better South Africa, on a better continent and in a better world.

Guerrillas and Combative Mothers introduces a rare interconnectivity between the struggle for freedom and motherhood, exploding the myth that women were involved mainly because of their 'motherly' instinct or for the protection of their children. It puts to rest the tired patriarchal view that the fight for one's citizenship and liberation is the monopoly of men or, put differently, that only men go to war to fight for their country.

While the book is about guerrillas and combative mothers, it is also about girls and young women, as most of the interviewees were young when they joined the struggle. As one reads their stories, one wonders about their joys, fears, anxieties, experiences and loss of girlhood.

If the story of women in MK is not yet fully or correctly told, the situation, as Magadla argues, is indeed worse for other liberation armies, such as the Azanian People's Liberation Army and the Azanian National Liberation Army, although the author does begin to excavate these. Magadla astonishingly finds the never heard of or talked about women in the Poqo uprisings. This is a feat that is common with her style of research, determination and commitment to centring the voices of those rendered voiceless.

The book returns to the still vexed matter of how to define guerrillas in the South African context. Magadla tries to demystify this confused vision of creating imaginary hierarchies and differences between the internal and external guerrillas. A language of definition is still needed.

With an amazing sensitivity to, respect for and empathy with the owner of the story, Magadla weaves narratives of pain, sorrow, survival, joy, resilience and triumphs with the common thread of relentless struggle for one's own and the country's freedom. Most, if not all, women combatants feel they were betrayed by the process of demobilisation/

integration/assimilation. This book leaves us with a niggling question: who were the beneficiaries of this integration and who are the current beneficiaries in whatever form of the South African National Defence Force? Can this perception of 'betrayal', real or imagined, still be addressed as the country prepares to celebrate 30 years of freedom?

Congratulations to Professor Magadla for being a daring trailblazer and a non-conforming African feminist scholar who affirms and gives dignity to women telling their stories. Hopefully, this book will help to open the eyes of those in power to correct past mistakes, give courage to those unable to tell their story to realise the importance of those stories to our past, present and future, and provide a lesson to all of us to respect these heroines. *Guerrillas and Combative Mothers* is a book South Africa needs and that all South Africans should read.

Thenjiwe Mtintso

Former uMkhonto we Sizwe Commander and
South African High Commissioner to Namibia



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We think and write in community. I wish to thank the intergenerational community that has supported me through the years of this research journey. Thank you to the elders whose life histories inform this book. I hope that the care I have taken and the choices I have made to tell parts of your story show the depths of my gratitude for your contribution to national liberation. I hope that you are able to say that 'the song she sings is us'. Thank you to Ambassador Thenjiwe Mtintso, *igorha elancama konke*, for her support over the years; for her courage, wisdom and humour; and for writing the foreword to this book. *Ndiyabulela, MamThenji, Tolo, Mchenge, Nozinja ziyakhonkotha!*

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Abbreviations

AFRO	Anti-Collaborationist Front
ANC	African National Congress
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
AZANLA	Azanian National Liberation Army
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
AZASO	Azanian Students' Organisation
BMATT	British Military Advisory Training Team
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
CPR	Certified Personnel Register
DMV	Department of Military Veterans
FAPLA	People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (Forças Armadas Populares de Libertação de Angola)
FRELIMO	Liberation Front of Mozambique (Frente de Libertação de Moçambique)
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
ISS	Institute for Security Studies
JMCC	Joint Military Co-ordinating Committee
LMAP	Liberia Mass Action for Peace
MAYO	Mamelodi Youth Organisation
MK	uMkhonto we Sizwe
MKMVA	uMkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association
MPLA	Movement for the Liberation of Angola
NAYO	National Youth Organisation
PAC	Pan Africanist Congress
PEBCO	Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation
PEWO	Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation

PEYCO	Port Elizabeth Youth Congress
PTSD	post-traumatic stress disorder
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SANDF	South African National Defence Force
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SWAPO	South West Africa People's Organisation
TBVC	Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei
TEC	Transitional Executive Council
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNITA	National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola)
WOMVASA	Women Military Veterans Association of South Africa
ZANU	Zimbabwe African National Union
ZAPU	Zimbabwe African People's Union



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Introduction

'Our Lips No Longer Sealed'

Comrades
I was not there
On December 16, 1961
And you probably were not there either

...
Yet comrades
Absent we were there
Because we all now agree
That this pain
Will not repair
Before the sharpening of our spears
Deep inside racist and fascist bones
To hunt and haunt the enemy
Out of our home, our social equal home.
— Lindiwe Mabuzza, 'December Sixteen'

Are there contradictions between being a woman and being a soldier?
Are we soldiers, or are we women, or women soldiers? But it doesn't
apply for me – they are just soldiers . . . We were not just supporters.
We were and will remain combatants of uMkhonto we Sizwe [MK],
in whatever strengths or weaknesses. MK, over time, also became less
patriarchal – if you look at MK in its last days and I was one of those
in its last days in Uganda.

— Thenjiwe Mtintso¹

1. At the Politics of the Armed Struggle in Southern Africa Conference, held at the University of the Witwatersrand, 24 November 2016.

When the African National Congress (ANC) established its military wing, uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in 1961, it departed from its five-decade-long commitment to a policy of non-violence. In *Long Walk to Freedom* (1995), MK's first commander, Nelson Mandela, describes a secret night meeting of members of the ANC National Executive in Durban in June 1961, where ANC president, Chief Albert Luthuli, was present. At this meeting, it was agreed that the new military wing of the organisation, MK, would be 'a separate and independent organ, linked to the ANC and under the overall control of the ANC, but fundamentally autonomous' (Mandela 1995: 322). On 16 December 1961, the day after Luthuli returned to South Africa from receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in Oslo, Norway, MK announced its existence by exploding homemade bombs 'at electric power stations and government offices in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban' (1995: 338).

It is this day that Lindiwe Mabuza recalls as representing the 'sharpening of our spears . . . / to hunt and haunt the enemy / out of our home, our social *equal* home' (Mabuza 2020 [1981]: 52; emphasis added). It was the ANC's official public declaration of its adoption of organised violence against apartheid as a strategy, what is often referred to as the 'armed struggle'. Since its formation, MK has been at the centre of some of the most difficult events and crises in the ANC. These moments have also led to radical transformations in the organisation as a whole. The participation of women in MK brought to the fore the organisation's ideas about gender during the struggle for national liberation and its vision of equality in a democratic future. As Shireen Hassim explains, 'the simple fact of their joining the armed wing acted as a destabilising factor in the most masculine of the ANC substructures' (2004: 440). Jacklyn Cock also contends that the participation of women in military training, which led to a 'breakdown of normal male-female roles, encouraged many women to discover new capacities within themselves', resulting in the image of the female MK guerrilla becoming 'a popular mass image of the strong, liberated woman' (1991: 167). *Guerrillas and Combative Mothers* will show that, indeed, 'MK provided an important arena within the movement in which issues of gender equality could be raised' (Hassim 2004: 441).

The women that became MK combatants or guerrillas, many of them no more than girls at the time, understood that their objective was not only to achieve liberation for the black majority, it was also to assert their equal claim to full non-sexist and non-patriarchal liberation. Take, for instance, one of the most celebrated MK guerrillas and current Minister of Defence and Military Veterans, Thandi Modise, who joined MK at the age of seventeen in 1976 after the 16 June 1976 Soweto student uprising against the introduction of Afrikaans as the medium of instruction (Cock 1991). Modise explains that she joined MK to fight against Bantu Education and Bantu Authority in Mahikeng (North West Province), and to fight for justice for the rape that she experienced at the age of fifteen. As a young woman, even then, she understood that her fight for national liberation would take place on multiple fronts:

I was in Mahikeng at Barolong High School. We then discussed as students and decided that even though Barolong High School as such was not going to be affected by the Afrikaans, we had another monster looming. [Lucas] Mangope [who became the leader of the Bantustan of Bophuthatswana] was preparing for his Bophuthatswana. Suddenly, without consultation, we were going to be taken away from our own country, be parcelled into what was Bophuthatswana. We were, without being consulted, losing our citizenship, which, in any case, at that time we were trying to talk about and to fight for . . . I left the country a young woman, wanting to go and do battle, as I said for the two reasons: education and retention of my citizenship. But I also wanted to fight because at the age of fifteen I'd been raped. I'd been impregnated. The courts failed me and my mother. I then decided I wasn't going to pursue school. I was going to join uMkhonto we Sizwe and in fact, that's what I went on to do. I fought to be a woman even in the ANC military camps . . . That it was correct for women to take up arms because certain battles, we believed even then, that they could only be won, they could only be understood by other women. That it was not wrong for women . . . to have a voice in any democratic system they were fighting for because, for many generations, African women had

been left out . . . There were very few of us women and so, you had to fight over a number of things (Modise, interview).

Guerrillas and Combative Mothers tells the story of the women who participated in South Africa's armed struggle from 1961 to 1994, and of their lives in democratic South Africa. It provides comprehensive accounts of the women who were formally trained in guerrilla warfare in MK and of the combative mothers, who received no military training and participated in the rural-based insurrection of the Pan Africanist Congress's (PAC's) armed wing, Poqo, in 1963 and the township-based self-defence units in the 1980s, who made the country 'ungovernable', leading to the final years of the National Party's apartheid government. This book describes the various ways in which women came to be politicised, the circumstances that led them to join the armed struggle inside South Africa and in exile. It discusses the forms of military training they received, their participation in combat activities, their personal transformation as women and as combatants during this time, their participation in the South African National Defence Force (SANDF)-led demobilisation process and their contributions to the democratic transformation of the SANDE.

Thirty-one years since its publication, Cock's *Colonels and Cadres: War and Gender in South Africa* (1991) remains the most authoritative account of the intersection of gender and war in the anti-apartheid struggle. The book offers a pioneering interpretation of how the project of sustaining apartheid relied on the militarisation of masculinity and femininity. While the white men of the South African Defence Force (SADF) were the faces of militarism through compulsory male conscription, Cock shows that while white women were perceived as 'protected', they played various crucial roles as soldiers, workers in arms production, civil defence and commando units, as mothers, friends and girlfriends, providing material and ideological support and legitimacy to apartheid militarism and violence. As Anne McClintock (1991: 110) argues, through their active participation in apartheid militarism, white women reproduced 'cultural and symbolic boundaries of white "nationhood" – standing discreetly at the elbows of white male power'.

Cock's book also depicts the women in MK as the 'resisters' (1991: 150). She profiles women like Thandi Modise and Refiloe Phelile Florence Jacqueline Sedibe (then Molefe, who is better known as Jackie Sedibe), who was MK's head of communications and the highest-ranked woman in MK. After 1994, Sedibe would become South Africa's highest-ranked woman in the SANDF, when she was appointed to the rank of major general. My interviews with Thandi Modise, who became the first chairperson of the Joint Standing Committee on Defence in Parliament in 1994, and Major General Sedibe show that they used their experience in MK to advocate for and implement policies that would ensure women's equal access and participation in the post-apartheid defence force.

Women who were guerrillas in MK have complained about the silence and erasure of women's contribution to the armed struggle. In 2011, marking the fiftieth anniversary of MK, in an article titled 'Flowers of the Revolution', Ayanda Dlodlo argued that the contributions of MK women are marginalised in the national memory, as the names of these women 'do not appear in any history book' and 'nobody sings about or shouts slogans about or even mentions in salutation' (Dlodlo 2011). In 2016, at the Politics of Armed Struggle in Southern Africa Conference at the University of the Witwatersrand, marking the fifty-fifth anniversary of the armed struggle, Thenjiwe Mtintso proclaimed that 'the story of women in the armed struggle has not been told and that it must be told by women who were in the armed struggle'. Mtintso was on a panel titled 'Fighting on Two Fronts: Experience and Practice of Gender Struggle within the Armed Struggle in Southern Africa' with Makhosazana Xaba and Raymond Suttner. Judy Seidman (a former MK member) facilitated the panel. During the colloquium "*S'obashaya ngamatye*": Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa', held via Zoom on 9–10 August 2021, Thandi Modise argued that the silence about women's roles in the armed struggle was 'a deliberate brushing out of women in the armed struggle, out of the history of liberation in this country'.

None of the of the key books about MK provide a detailed account of women's roles and ideas of armed struggle (Ellis and Sechaba 1992; Cherry 2011; Ellis 2012; Simpson 2016). Stephen Ellis's *External Mission: The ANC in Exile, 1960–1990* (2012) provides a profoundly

masculine account of the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP), with male figures as the key strategists and executors of the evolving tactics of armed struggle. Janet Cherry's *Umkhonto weSizwe: A Jacana Pocket History* (2011) succeeds in drawing on the oral histories of MK members and shows the ways in which MK inspired the militant tactics of groups inside South Africa, such as Amabutho in Port Elizabeth (now called Gqeberha) in the Eastern Cape in the 1980s to carry out the 'people's war'. However, the protagonists in Cherry's book remain overwhelmingly male. Thula Simpson's *Umkhonto Wesizwe: The ANC'S Armed Struggle* (2016) covers the various stages of the armed struggle from sabotage, guerrilla warfare and armed propaganda to the people's war. It is well researched and written in a compelling movie-like narrative that moves from October 1952 to May 1994. As we see the rise of a new generation of black South African historians in the academy, Simpson's tome should inspire this generation. However, as Cherry says of Simpson's book, 'despite claims that this book is based on first-hand testimony, the testimony that is used is primarily that of [male] leaders who have been interviewed; there is little of a voice from below' (2018: 293).

Raymond Suttner's sustained work on the ANC underground (see Suttner 2003a, 2007, 2008) is among the few academic histories that illuminate the role of gender in the underground – and specifically women's roles. His interviews with MK women such as Totsie Memela, Dipuo Mvelase, Shirley Gunn, Phumla Williams and Faith Radebe, among others, provide important original narratives of women's experiences in MK. Suttner (2007: 244) uses Memela's role in Operation Vula to challenge a narrow conception of combat, as I discuss in Chapter 1. Suttner's (2005) work on ANC masculinities also importantly complicates what some scholars, such as Elaine Unterhalter (2000), have called 'heroic masculinity' in the autobiographical writing about the anti-apartheid struggle. However, as Suttner points out, 'there were both male and female heroic projects' (2005: 72) in the ANC. Suttner shows that another motivation for men to join the ANC was to assert their adulthood and manhood in an apartheid context where black men and women were seen as perpetual children. Apartheid presented a paradox of childhood for black people. While apartheid infantilised them, it is

also true that a key motivation for participating in the national liberation was because millions of black children could not enjoy childhood in the midst of the daily violence in their communities. Therefore, the fight was for the protection and preservation of childhood, as well as a claim to adulthood, 'for dignity and reclaiming of rights and to be treated as an adult human being' (Suttner 2005: 76).

The South African Democracy Education Trust's (SADET's) multi-volume *The Road to Democracy in South Africa* provides invaluable interviews with veterans of the various liberation movements, and academic accounts of how multiple actors across time shaped turning points in the anti-apartheid struggle. Zine Magubane's (2010) chapter in Volume 4, provides a seminal contribution on women's militancy across different eras and arenas of the struggle (discussed further in Chapter 2). Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane's chapter in Volume 2 (2006) on the ANC underground in the 1970s provides rich detail about the roles played by women such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Albertina Sisulu and Joyce Sikakane, among others. There are chapters by women in MK and the PAC and its military wing, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), in *Prodigal Daughters: Stories of South African Women in Exile* (Ngcobo 2012). Various articles, interviews and theses/dissertations also provide some insight into women's roles in liberation organisations and armed wings (Von den Steinen 1999; Curnow 2000; Hassim 2004; Makau 2009; Miller 2009; Houston 2013; Magadla 2015, 2017). Lynda von den Steinen's (1999) thesis on the experiences of MK rank-and-file soldiers, who joined MK after the 1976 Soweto uprising, stands out as one of the most detailed accounts of young people's motivations to join the armed struggle, everyday life in MK camps and a chapter on women in MK. The experiences of Weziwe Rachel Ncome, whom I also interviewed, feature prominently in that study.

Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (2007) has written about the experiences of twenty South African nurses from the Cape, Natal and Transvaal provinces, many of them recruited by Albertina Sisulu and Govan Mbeki, who left South Africa in early December 1961 to assist and train a new generation of nurses in newly independent Tanzania. Some of these women became part of the MK underground, providing safe houses for new recruits and some of them, like Edna Miya, 'were listed

by the ANC as members of MK who qualified' (2007: 136) for SANDF demobilisation benefits that I discuss in Chapter 3. Arianna Lissoni and Maria Suriano have written about the experiences of Tanzanian women who married MK men, some of whom returned to South Africa with them and the 'experiences, expectations, frustrations and feelings of abandonment of those Tanzanian women who were unable to accompany their husbands and partners to South Africa – or were "left behind"' (2014: 144). Zosa De Sas Kropiwnicki's (2013) research on second-generation exiles provides an important gendered discussion of agency and identity formation of children born to exiled parents.

There are a number of veterans who have published autobiographies/memoirs of their lives during the anti-apartheid struggle and afterwards. In Unterhalter's (2000) examination of 66 anti-apartheid autobiographies written between 1948–1999, only 24 were written by women. Twenty-eight years into democracy, few women veterans of the national liberation struggle have published autobiographies and even fewer who were in the armed struggle. Ruth Mantile's *I Survived: Evolved against All the Odds* (2019) is a significant contribution to MK women's memoirs. It has a striking cover image of a woman's pink underwear hanging on a laundry line, with young children standing on top of a military vehicle peeping through the bush and blood splattered above the image of the military vehicle. The book provides rich details of Mantile's journey to exile through Lesotho, military training in multiple MK camps and places (Viana, Camalundi, Caculama, Malanje and Cacuso) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). It also provides a rare account of an MK woman's participation in two confrontations between MK members and the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (União Nacional para a Independência Total de Angola, UNITA) in Angola. Mantile's memoir also provides harrowing details of her experience of rape at the age of twelve, twice being raped at the age of fourteen and at eighteen in the Viana MK camp by a fellow MK combatant, which resulted in a pregnancy. In Chapter 1, based on our interview and her memoir, I discuss Mantile's combat experience against UNITA and the ways in which MK leadership responded to the sexual violence against her.

The Department of Military Veterans (DMV) launched an oral history project that encourages veterans to tell their stories. In 2018, all four of the autobiographies of MK and APLA veterans were written by men (HSRC 2022). In April 2022, of the six autobiographies that the DMV supported towards publication by the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC), the only one by a woman was Gertrude Fester's *Prison Note Book 1: Prison Number V2957/88* (2022). The edited volume *Voices from the Underground: Eighteen Life Stories from Umkhonto we Sizwe's Ashley Kriel Detachment* (Gunn and Haricharan 2019) provides inspiring accounts of the contributions of individual members of the Ashley Kriel Detachment, which includes four women.

The Jacana Pocket Biography Series has published short biographies of some key MK figures, such as Govan Mbeki (Bundy 2012) and Chris Hani (Macmillan 2014). Of the fifteen biographies in this series so far, only two are about women, Josie Mpama/Palmer and Ingrid Jonker. Hassim's (2014) book about the ANC Women's League contains a chapter about women and armed struggle.

In Chapter 1, I point out that public culture discussions about women's roles often fixate on the sexual politics of their military camp experience. More precisely, there is an overwhelming perception that all women who joined MK were sexually abused by their male comrades. It often seems that when women who were in MK speak about their experience, they must not only acknowledge that there was sexual harassment and violence in MK, but they also must attest to their victimhood to this violence. The women that were in MK do not deny this reality and some of them interviewed in this book did experience harassment and rape.

However, to focus only on women's experiences of sexual violence misses the ways in which women resisted sexual harassment and violence. The increase in the numbers of women in MK after 1976 gave women the momentum to confront sexism and to demand better measures and policies against abusers. Interviews in this book with Makhosazana Xaba, Pamela Daniels and Nomfundiso Kulati (discussed in Chapter 1), for example, show that conditions for MK women that joined in the 1980s were much better because of the demands that had been made by the women that preceded them. In an interview on eNews Channel Africa

(ENCA) in 2019, Lindiwe Zulu explained that although there ‘were only two women with more than 200 men’ in Pango, Angola, where she received military training in 1987, the culture in MK was conducive to women’s participation and leadership:

I would say at my time, maybe at the time that I got there, things were very different. The women of the time when I was there were women who were fighting to be recognised as women because they also wanted to be commanders . . . Because even though we were in a liberation struggle, even though the ANC understood the role of women, to get women to be commanders and commissars, it wasn’t going to happen because men are generally just used to the fact that they have to be the ones that have to be in charge, that have to be in control . . . I arrived at the time of the likes of Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula: no-nonsense kind of women. I arrived at the time of Thembi Majola. Again, a woman who was also given an opportunity to be a commander, even though it was short-lived but I arrived at a time when the consciousness about the importance of women and giving women that opportunity in the camps was really high (ENCA 2019).

James Ngculu argues that the generation of women in MK who joined in the late 1970s helped to ‘revolutionalise the ANC and put the issue of gender on the agenda’ (2009: 149). Mentioning the names of women such as Mtintso, Zou Kota, Nosiviwe Mapisa [Nqakula] and Miranda Ngculu, he suggests that their previous roles in the Black Consciousness Movement and the Mass Democratic Movement inside the country meant that these women were ‘accustomed to being vocal and assertive’ (2009: 149). Ngculu asserts that by the late 1980s, when the likes of Lindiwe Zulu joined MK, ‘a gendered approach and perspective in the movement were no longer “by-the-way” references but intrinsic to the thinking and approach of the movement’ (2009: 149). This was confirmed by Mtintso in one of the epigraphs to this chapter, when she said that ‘MK, over time, also became less patriarchal’.

This also puts Seidman and Mtintso's outraged response to a *Mail & Guardian* article in 2017 into perspective. On 27 October 2017, the *Mail & Guardian* newspaper ran a front-page story titled 'Women Freedom Fighters Tell of Sexual Abuse in Camps' (Collison 2017). The story detailed rampant sexual abuses against women in the ANC and the PAC in exile. It featured the story of Sibongile Promise Khumalo, an ex-combatant of the PAC, allegedly raped by former PAC president, Potlako Leballo. Some of the women freedom fighters interviewed in this article included Mtintso and Seidman. They wrote a response to the *Mail & Guardian* titled 'Gender Struggle Was Intrinsic to SA's Liberation' (Seidman and Mtintso 2017), in which they argued that Collison's article distorted women's roles in the liberation movements. While maintaining that sexism and patriarchal double standards constrained women's roles in national liberation, Seidman and Mtintso made a strong case that women's roles in the armed struggle, and broader liberation, cannot be reduced to victimhood. More poignantly, they argued: 'The slander that women in the struggle were treated as sex slaves or sex toys is just that: a slander that denies women our agency, our commitment, belief and actions, as liberation fighters. We are proud that we fought for our liberation' (Seidman and Mtintso 2017).

Guerrillas and Combative Mothers centres women's agency, commitment, beliefs and actions in the armed struggle against apartheid. It provides a definitive record of the 'political impact of women in MK' (Hassim 2004: 440), women in the PAC and the self-defence units and their role in the successful defeat of apartheid in South Africa.

While this introduction draws heavily on the public and academic debates about women's roles in MK, this book goes beyond the focus on women in MK. Chapter 2, on combative motherhood, focuses on the role of women in the PAC and in the self-defence units. It shows that the majority of South African women participated in the armed struggle inside South Africa without military training. Their role, too, has been brushed out of the history of the liberation struggle.

We know even less about the role of women in the PAC and APLA. Kwandiwe Kondlo's *In the Twilight of the Revolution: The Pan Africanist Congress of Azania (South Africa) 1959–1994* (2009) is silent on women's participation, including known PAC and APLA women, such as Nomvo

Booi and Joyce Sifuba, who was the PAC's chief representative in Zimbabwe in 1986. Kondlo even goes so far as to insinuate that women played no role in the organising of the anti-pass march to Sharpeville, which the PAC led on 21 March 1960. He quotes a PAC man who claimed that the male members of the PAC had 'left their wives at home to look after children' (Kondlo 2009: 64). Tom Lodge's (1983, 1986) accounts of the Poqo insurrections of the 1960s focus on the role of migrant male workers in the Western Cape. His later book on Sharpeville provides a holistic and vivid account of women's roles on the day of the massacre and after (Lodge 2011).

Gregory Houston, Thami ka Plaatjie and Thozama April's article on military training and PAC camps in exile between 1961 and 1981 paints a picture of a party that faced leadership instability throughout its exile period (2015). As a result, there was a lack of strategic direction given to military training and harsh living conditions for the APLA recruits. Nomvo Booi (2012) details the mothering role that she assumed in the PAC both in South Africa and as the head of health and social welfare in Tanzania and Zimbabwe. In Tanzania, Booi (2012) also counselled couples and officiated several weddings of PAC men and women who were marrying South Africans or Tanzanians.

Lodge argues that 'in terms of its geographical extensiveness, the numbers involved and its timespan, the Poqo conspiracies of 1962–1968 represent the largest and most sustained African insurrectionary movement since the inception of modern African political organisations in South Africa' (1986: 1). In this book, I discuss the experiences of women who were active in Poqo insurrectionary activities in Mqanduli in 1963, which is the year that the PAC planned a national insurrection against apartheid. These women, such as Mildred Nonotse Daphu, believed that Poqo was 'building a force, soldiers who would challenge white people' and they were part of that 'force' (Daphu, interview). There are few accounts of women's participation in the Poqo insurrections, just as there are limited accounts of women's participation during MK's sabotage period from 1961 to 1963. Examining their contributions to the inception of the armed struggle in 1961 allows us to appreciate the foundation that they set for strategies and tactics that shaped women's actions in the 1970s and 1980s.

In her book on MK, Cherry (2011) highlights the contribution of the Port Elizabeth-based self-defence unit, Amabutho, to the armed struggle in the 1980s. In Chapter 2, I examine the contributions of women to the strategies and tactics of Amabutho. This is a contribution to the literature of women's part in the uprisings in townships in the 1980s (Bonnin 1997, 2000; Marks 2001; Cherry 2007; Bridger 2021). Through their experiences, it is possible to see the contours of South Africa's armed struggle in the homes, schools, churches, funerals and all spaces of socio-economic life, where apartheid violence was daily felt and ultimately resisted. Women's roles across eras of struggle, across geographical spaces and across generations illuminate their ability to take up arms and claim equal right to the fight for liberation. Women transformed and democratised the liberation movements and laid the foundation for the codification of gender equality in democratic South Africa. Maxi Schoeman and Yolanda Sadie point out that 'the issue of gender has become, for all intents and purposes, acceptable and part of what post-apartheid claims to be about' (2004: 81). That this is so is only because of women's agency, commitment, beliefs and actions.

'Our wounds, our lips': Researching women and the armed struggle

They wanted us to tell and listen before our wounds healed.
As if they didn't know that the thunder of pain is deafening.
They didn't even notice that our lips were sealed.

'We need to move on', they said and got laws repealed.
They tried to make us believe that the truth was beckoning.
'We'd prefer waiting', we said, 'until our wounds have healed.'

One after the other, the stories of other people were revealed.
In time, the processes and the performances started settling.
By then, no one really cared that our lips were still sealed.

Knotty stories were unpicked, their multiple layers unpeeled.
Some truths were deadening, others left audiences trembling.
We watched, firm in our resolve to speak, after, our wounds were
healed.

Audiences saw through some perpetrators' telling and squealed.
 The performance had to go on, the world was watching and questioning.
 By then, no one really cared that our lips remained sealed.

Years later, our wounds healed, the truth is our shield.
 We open up to be heard, for us this act will be strengthening.
 After all, today many seem to agree that before our wounds healed,
 We could not talk and listen. So here we are today: our lips no longer
 sealed.

— Makhosazana Xaba, 'Our Wounds, Our Lips'

Makhosazana Xaba read this poem as part of the keynote address she gave during the colloquium "*S'obashaya ngamatye*": Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa' in 2021. Her keynote address was titled 'Women in the Armed Struggle: The Unaccounted for, the Unnameable and the Unknowable, 60 Years On'. She used the poem to make a point about how to approach texts and ways to pose questions about the methods that inform the books that we read. She quoted from Simpson's book, where he outlines his methodology, which explains that his sources were 'newspaper reports, trial records and oral history collections, to the archives of a number of individuals, organisations and governments party to the conflict' (2016: vii). Xaba then asked the question, 'How many women in the armed struggle were not part of these sources that Simpson mentions because their wounds had not healed and therefore their lips were sealed' when he conducted his research?

While Xaba used her poem to make a point about methodological choices and how to approach academic texts, she explained that the poem was about South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The point was that the premise of the TRC was that those who had experienced human rights violations during apartheid would be ready to volunteer their experience of violence, forgive their perpetrators and move on. The process assumed that survivors of apartheid violence readily had the language to articulate their experience of violence. As Xaba points out, the TRC left little room for survivors to heal and then use speech to reflect on their experience. It assumed that speech, the

articulation of violence, ought to precede the healing instead of vice versa.

Nthabiseng Motsemme has argued that the 'TRC assumed that the world was only knowable through words, and thus the basis for beginning a process of healing South Africa's violent past would be organized through acts of testimony' (2004: 914). She explains that the TRC became a 'canvas on which the discourse of the new South Africa would be written, produced and visibly shown . . . another text about nation, or more specifically "rainbow nation"' (2004: 912). As Xaba asks, what about the people who could not provide testimony because their wounds had not healed and their lips remained sealed? How would the 'new' nation understand their silence? Or, as Motsemme puts it: 'What happens when those who have been denied the occasion to tell their stories, and whose bodies and cultures have been systematically violated and dehumanized, discover that there are things that remain unspeakable?' (2004: 915)

A notable gendered aspect of the TRC was that women mostly testified not about the brutalities that happened to them, but about violence that happened to their family members, their husbands and children (Ross 2003). Xaba's invocation about the intersection between time, healing and speech is perhaps reflective of the gendered ways in which 'women's notions of pain, suffering, humiliation and joy remain limited within the social sciences' (Motsemme 2004: 924).

A wide range of feminist scholars agree that 'all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous' (McClintock 1991: 104). The fact that women could not be members of the ANC until 31 years after it was founded in 1912 shows that even national liberation movements that emerged to fight against colonial occupation assumed patriarchal male authority and dominance over women as a norm that would be sustained in the new liberated nation. In Mozambique (Urdang 1989), Zimbabwe (Staunton 1990; Nhongo-Simbanegavi 2000; Zimbabwe Women Writers 2000; Lyons 2004; O'Gorman 2011), Namibia (Metsola 2006; Akawa 2014), Eritrea (Bernal 2000) and Algeria (Vince 2015), women that participated in the armed struggles for national liberation have faced a disappointing post-independence context, in which their contributions to liberation are undermined and a

masculine political culture that allows women's symbolic representation in institutions of governance has prevailed. Natalya Vince (2015) in the book *Our Fighting Sisters: Nation, Memory and Gender in Algeria, 1954–2012* captures post-independence betrayals for women in Algeria, which is a recurring theme for women across Africa: 'The idea that war was a brief parenthesis of new roles and status for women, brutally closed in . . . by a patriarchal nationalist movement which removed them from the historical narrative, apart from fetishised symbols, and denied them any real role in the post-colonial project' (Vince 2015: 4).

To write about women's contribution to the armed struggle means that one has to understand that some experiences for women remain 'unspeakable' and sometimes it means that certain parts of the story can come to the fore because of the political context of the time. For example, Suttner (2008) points to the disjuncture of the account that Thandi Modise provides Cock (1991) regarding power relations between men and women in MK camps, and a later interview that she gave to Robyn Curnow (2000). In the earlier interview with Cock (1991), Modise emphasises that relations between MK men and women were equal, that women were not subjected to constant sexual harassment, nor did they undermine their positions of authority. But a decade later, in an interview with Curnow (2000), Modise cites a pervasive patriarchal culture within MK. Reconciling the disjuncture in Modise's narrating of gender politics with MK a decade apart, Suttner (2008) postulates that timing may have had something to do with how much Modise could reveal to Cock because the interview took place at the politically fragile time of the democratic transition, when the liberation movements, especially the ANC, were obliged to appear as representing a united front. The interview with Curnow (and subsequently that with me in 2010) took place when the ANC had firmly cemented its power in post-apartheid South Africa. The different contexts then permitted a different telling of the same story, which allowed Modise to reveal details about gendered differences that would not compromise the political context of the time.

In Zimbabwe, Tanya Lyons (2004) explains that it was close to fifteen years into independence that the women who had participated

in the liberation movements of the Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) and the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) began to narrate their experiences of unequal power relations between themselves and male combatants. One of the key moments that led to a public discussion about sexual politics in the liberation movements in Zimbabwe was the release of the 1996 film *Flame* by Ingrid Sinclair, which reflected on the experiences of women in the training camps in ZANU's military wing, the Zimbabwe African National Liberation Army, and their suffering in post-independence Zimbabwe, because their war efforts remained unrecognised.

Conducting this research almost twenty years into South Africa's democracy (since 2010) has meant that the women I interviewed had settled into new political and social reality and had an opportunity to reflect on their choices and actions during the armed struggle. A new generation of South Africans has become interested in this research, not because they lived under apartheid, but because their own lives have been shaped by the legacies of these struggles. Hilary Sapire and Chris Saunders make the point that, in time, 'greater distance will grow between those who write these struggles and the struggles themselves' (2013: 293). I came to this research as part of a generation of South Africans, born in the mid-1980s, who came into adulthood in democratic South Africa. Naeem Inayatullah explains that 'theoretical decisions emerge from theorist's needs and wounds' (2011: 6) and Linda Tuhiwai Smith contends further that 'research is not an innocent or distant academic exercise but an activity that has something at stake and that occurs in a set of political and social conditions' (1999: 5). In other words, my own positionality as researcher plays a vital role, as it influences the exercise of research and its implications. My personal interest in research on the armed struggle and the lives of former combatants after apartheid was first shaped by my experience of growing up in a household with a father who had left the SANDF in 1996 when he was not yet 40, after being integrated from the Transkei Defence Force. My curiosity was also compounded by the fact that my mother, who was a psychiatric nurse, used to come home with dramatic stories about the recently retired soldiers in her ward who were suffering with mental illness, following their demobilisation. It was

from my father that I heard of the case of Lieutenant Sibusiso Madubela, who shot dead six white SANDF members, including a white civilian woman, at the Tempe Military base in Bloemfontein on 9 September 1999 (see Mashike and Mokalobe 2003: 15). Madubela, a former APLA combatant, was from my hometown of Mthatha. I vaguely remember the television and radio reports about Colin Chauke, the former MK combatant turned cash-in-transit robber and wanted fugitive. So, while the public image of the soldier is that of supposed heroic masculinity, I grew up with an alternative archive of images of former male soldiers who were overwhelmed by the realities of everyday life.

In 2008, I worked as a research intern in the security sector governance programme at the Institute for Security Studies (ISS), where I was introduced to the literature on demobilisation and civilian reintegration of ex-combatants in South Africa. This literature provided a language to understand the sudden early retirement of my father, and the general profile of the male demobilised soldier in South Africa, whom Susan E. Cook defines as the 'walking wounded – depressed and violent men unable to overcome the traumas of combat and the institutions of war' (2006: 41). In a sense, the literature helped me to place my own family history within a broader national process of transition and military veteran discourses.

What I found missing in this narrative were the experiences and stories of the women who had fought in the armed struggle. They did not feature in the images of combatants who had turned robbers and private security mercenaries. Upon completing my Master's degree in International Affairs in 2010, I returned to the ISS as a research consultant, working on issues of women, peace and security under the guidance of Professor Cheryl Hendricks. To mark ten years of the United Nations adoption of Resolution 1325, we produced a documentary called *Women and Security Sector Transformation in South Africa* (Hendricks and Magadla 2010), which profiled three women who had been instrumental in the gender transformation of the SANDF and the South African Police.² I interviewed the three women: Major

2. The documentary is available here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BMWctWMJzmY>.

General Ntsiki Memela-Motumi – who was then the chief director of transformation management at the SANDF; Thandi Modise, who was then the deputy secretary-general of the ANC and previous chair of the Portfolio Committee on Defence in the national assembly; and Dr Mala Singh – former deputy national commissioner of the South African Police. The interviews with Memela-Motumi and Modise, who are both former combatants of MK, provided rich accounts of the experiences of women in MK and their pioneering role in the democratic transformation and governance of the SANDF (discussed in Chapter 3).

From 2012 to 2016, I undertook my doctoral studies in the Department of Political and International Studies at Rhodes University on the role of women in the armed struggle and their participation in the state-led demobilisation and civilian reintegration process. This book draws from life history interviews I conducted for that doctoral study with women who were combatants of MK, APLA and the Port Elizabeth-based Amabutho self-defence unit from July 2013 to November 2014, May–June 2018 and March 2019. The interviews took place in Gqeberha, Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown), East London, Mthatha, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Bloemfontein, as well as five telephone interviews with participants in Nelspruit (in Mpumalanga), Orange Farm and Pretoria (in Gauteng), Butterworth and Somerset East (in the Eastern Cape). I also draw from the 2010 documentary interviews that I conducted with Minister Thandi Modise and Major General Ntsiki Memela-Motumi. In total, 40 women ex-combatants were interviewed: 22 from MK, 6 from APLA, 11 from Amabutho, and 1 from a Pretoria-based self-defence unit. The other six interviews were with Sicelo Madlevu of Amabutho (August 2013); Zile Xolo of the PAC (October 2013); a representative of the director of social services at the Department of Military Veterans in May 2014; with former MK combatant, the first director general of the DMV and adviser to the minister of the defence force, Mr Tsepe Motumi; former MK and former chief of the SANDF, retired General Siphiwe Nyanda in May and June 2018; and one former male MK combatant in March 2019, Silumko ‘Soks’ Sokupa, with whom I served on the High-Level Review Panel on the State Security Agency in 2018. Altogether, this book draws on 46 formal interviews.

On 9–10 August 2021, I co-convened a virtual colloquium, “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and Sixty Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’.³ This was to mark the sixtieth anniversaries of MK and APLA. Among those who participated were individuals I had interviewed, such as Minister Thandi Modise (who was appointed as Minister of Defence and Military Veterans on 5 August 2021) and Makhosazana Xaba, who provided keynote addresses. I facilitated a panel composed of former combatants from MK and the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA), the military wing of the Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO). These former guerrillas included Totsie Memela, whom I interviewed in 2014, Ambassador Naomi Ribbon Mosholi of MK and AZANLA ex-combatants Thulasizwe Legodi and Ntombizodwa Zondo. Other veterans who participated in the colloquium included the late Ambassador Lindiwe Mabuza, Honourable Baleka Mbete and Ambassador Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele, who took part in a discussion of the South African publication of the anthology *Malibongwe: Poems from the Struggle by ANC Women* (Molefe 2020), which I discuss below. I also draw on some of the insights that emanated from that colloquium.

With their consent, I use the real names of the women who participated in my research. Only one participant requested not to be named and this has been respected. There are cases when a participant has revealed sensitive information, such as sexual harassment and abuse involving themselves or others, and here names have been omitted. I am glad that most of the women interviewed gave permission for their names to be used. As Dlodlo (2011) and others have debated, in academic and popular culture, one sees few names of the women who risked their lives for the liberation of South Africa. This book hopes to cement their names in that important history.

3. The 9–10 August 2021 colloquium was hosted by the Political and International Studies department (Rhodes University), in collaboration with the Centre for Women and Gender Studies (Nelson Mandela University) and the Historical Studies Department (University of Cape Town). The colloquium was televised on Parliament TV Channel 408 and Parliament YouTube channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0ulo6OmVQuI&t=21s> and the Rhodes University YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cfZBLQ15ucs&t=5834s>.

Furthermore, using the names of participants made it easier to triangulate the information they gave about themselves and others through available literature, newspaper records and the reports of the TRC, among others. It also made it possible to build on conversations that some of the women had with other researchers. For instance, I came to learn about Nomvo Booï through her chapter in the book *Prodigal Daughters: Stories of South African Women in Exile* (2012), edited by Lauretta Ngcobo. I learned that Booï lived in Amalinda in East London. Upon meeting her, it was difficult to do a long interview because she had suffered a stroke in 2009. She gave me permission to speak to her daughter, Sibongile, who gave me details about her that were not covered in the chapter, such as her mother's participation in the SANDF-led demobilisation process and the benefits she received as a military veteran. I also interviewed former MK combatant Nondwe Mankahla in 2013 at her home in New Brighton, Gqeberha. Her interview is triangulated with the chapter on her life in the first volume of SADET's *The Road to Democracy: South Africans Telling their Stories* (Mankahla 2008). Mankahla is also included in Shanthini Naidoo's book, *Women in Solitary: Inside the Female Resistance to Apartheid* (2020). In this way, I was also able to use the interview I conducted for a documentary project in 2010 with previous interviews that Modise gave to Cock (1991) and Curnow (2000). Former MK combatant Nomsa Ngcipe is briefly mentioned in Mzwakhe Ndllela's book, *For the Fallen: Honouring the Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Liberation Struggle* (2013). In our interview, Ngcipe emphasised that she was motivated to join MK after the killing of her brother in the Maseru massacre on 9 December 1982, when 37 people were killed by the SADF (which is detailed in Ndllela's book). My interview with retired Major General Jackie Sedibe in June 2018 covered her role in the military integration process and the democratic transformation of the SANDF. I drew from her interview with Cock (1991) and other newspaper profiles of her role in MK.

Two women that I interviewed, Pumza Dyantyi (*nom de guerre* Alice Tsongo) and Belinda Martin (*nom de guerre* Gloria Mtungwa), have poems published in the anthology *Malibongwe: Poems from the Struggle by ANC Women*, edited by Lindiwe Mabuza (as Sono Molefe). The book was published for the first time in South Africa in April 2020, after

its first English publication in 1981. Makhosazana Xaba, another MK combatant I interviewed, provides the introduction to the latest version. Many of the poems by women that I use throughout this book are from this anthology. I use them to capture the voices and emotions that women felt at that time. The poems illuminate their joys, struggles, fears, vision and courage. Motsemme (2004) encourages social scientists to use creative works to find languages of pain and joy. After all, as Lindiwe Mabuza exclaimed, poetry ‘gets to the heart of the matter’ (Malec 2021).

Dyanty’s and Martin’s surnames are slightly misspelt in *Malibongwe*. Houston and Magubane (2006) also misspell Dyanty’s surname. I learned through this project that cross-referencing allows us to get closer and closer to some of the most basic biographical details of the women combatants of the struggle. The fact that many of the women used several names while operating underground inside South Africa, and other names in exile, makes this task a continuous challenge and a moving archive. With each publication, we gain a fuller picture of the individuals who sacrificed their lives for freedom.

Furthermore, I benefited from reading the publicly available transcripts of interviews conducted by Raymond Suttner with MK women such as Phumla Williams, Dipuo Mvelase, Faith Radebe and Totsie Memela, among others. When I interviewed Memela in 2014, I was able to refer to her interview with Suttner, as well as the account of her role in Operation Vula written by Conny Braam (2004). Through the TRC reports, I was able to get further details of political activity in Jixini village in Mqanduli, former Transkei, in 1962, which spoke to the accounts of the women I interviewed in Jixini village (TRC 1998: 48). I also used transcripts from public lectures given by some veterans, such as Thenjiwe Mtintso’s presentation at the 2016 Politics of the Armed Struggle in Southern Africa Conference, Lindiwe Zulu’s ENCA interview (ENCA 2019), Ayanda Dlodlo’s O.R. Tambo Lecture (Dlodlo 2020) and Phumla Williams’s Amaqhawe Foundation Lecture (26 August 2020).

A number of the elders who took part in my research passed away before the publication of this book. They are: Nomvo Boo, Belinda Martin, Nombulelo Gwendolyn April, Smolly Maqhunga, Linda

Mjekula, Pumza Dyantyi, Lindiwe Mabuza and Silumko 'Soks' Sokupa. May the spirits of these ancestors shine a light upon us.

Lastly, my naming the individuals who gave their lives to the liberation of South Africa builds on the long list of names that we know because of the enduring work of many researchers and activists (Cock 1991; Suttner 2003a; Houston and Magubane 2006; Kondlo 2009; Makau 2009; Cherry 2011; Ellis 2012; Macmillan 2013; Dlamini 2014; Hiralal 2015; Simpson 2016; Ndlovu 2017; Naidoo 2020; Mchunu 2020).

Structure of the book

It should be clear at this point that women's contributions to the armed struggle have been erased in public culture and in academic and non-academic research. Women guerrillas of MK have been most outspoken about the 'brushing out' of their participation in the struggle. However, women's roles in Poqo, MK and the internally based self-defence units made the national liberation possible and, during and after the democratic transition, women have led the fight for gender equality.

The first chapter focuses on the transnationally trained women guerrillas that joined MK, who were called Mzana. The chapter first traces the social world from which the term emerged, among amaXhosa in the Eastern Cape. In doing so, it shows that the discursive travelling of the term may reveal the gender ideology that women in MK were expected to adhere to. The chapter provides details of life in military camps, combat operations that women participated in, sexual and gender politics within MK, and women's knowledge of torture use by the ANC, among others. It illuminates the fact that conditions in the camps compelled women to require MK to be responsive to women's specific needs, such as maternal health, contraception and pregnancy. Overall, women's experience in MK shows how the organisation changed over time to respond to women and questions of gender equality. Women's combat deployment relied on their military training and a dynamic performance of femininity.

Chapter 2 focuses on the South African-based combative mothers and young women who participated in the township uprisings of the 1980s. It starts by examining the women in Poqo, who resisted the apartheid-imposed Bantu authorities in the 1960s. The experiences

and contributions of Poqo women show that women were involved in underground military activities from the beginning of the armed struggle. The discussion on banishment shows that this was used as a tool to punish and silence activists based in the former homelands and, as resistance in the townships grew in the 1970s, banishment extended to urban-based anti-apartheid activists. The chapter then focuses on the role of combative mothers in Gqeberha in the 1980s, who were active as members of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO), the Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation (PEWO) and the paramilitary self defence unit, Amabutho. The lives of combative mothers illuminate the intersection of maternal politics and political tradition towards social change. The chapter then focuses on the role of the young women who remained in South Africa between the 1980s and 1994, who are part of the generation known as the 'young lions' that made the country ungovernable and, ultimately, led the National Party government to seek negotiations with the national liberation movements. The chapter analyses the roles of young women who were active in Amabutho and formally belonged to the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress (PEYCO) and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). While mothers and young women have been erased from the history of the township uprisings, this chapter shows that they played an essential role as protectors and protagonists in the political violence that marked a turning point in the struggle for a democratic South Africa.

Chapter 3 examines the demobilisation and reintegration process undergone by statutory and non-statutory forces, following the unbanning of the liberation movements in 1990. The chapter puts forward the argument that when it comes to women ex-combatants' participation in this SANDF-led process, it was the transnationally trained women who took part, to the exclusion of the majority of women who participated inside South Africa. The chapter discusses their experiences, demobilisation benefits and the various reasons many of them chose not to continue as soldiers in the SANDF. It concludes with a discussion about the role of former MK combatants in the gender transformation of the SANDF.

Chapter 4 focuses on the lives of women ex-combatants in democratic South Africa beyond the integration process. It briefly discusses women

ex-combatant's access to the special pension and the benefits provided by the DMV. The chapter shows that the current legislative framework that guides the work of the DMV is imbued with similar political tensions to those of the initial demobilisation process, in terms of contestation about the definition of the military veteran, since many who perceive themselves as having been combatants continue to be excluded from this framework and the material benefits it offers. The chapter then focuses on women's personal, family, social, political, psychological and spiritual lives. It shows that the majority of transnationally trained and internally based women ex-combatants are the main economic providers of their families. In a context where they no longer have to fight to gain recognition of citizenship, much of their lives focus on the economic survival of their families and communities. Most women 'hustle' in the informal economy to make something out of nothing. The chapter concludes by examining the different ways in which women are navigating civilian life, how they deal with enduring memories of the past and its persistent wounds.

The Conclusion reflects on the significance of revisiting this period of South African history and the lessons that these women's contributions to the armed struggle offer us in the ongoing fight for substantive gender equality.



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Mzana

Transnational Guerrillas

Brilliant daughter of Africa
 Fighting woman of our land
 Hunted across the country
 Once

By ever frenzied Special Branch hiding behind laws
 Who now have their pound of flesh behind bars
 Their pound of flesh on scales of blood behind walls of writing
 But still Dorothy, age-old African victim and victor
 You still instill fear in their hearts

— Duduzile Ndelu, ‘Fighting Woman’

Sobashiya abazali ekhaya [we will leave our parents at home]
Saphuma sangena kwamanye amazwe [to escape to other nations]
Lapho kungazi khona ubaba nomama [that father and mother do not
 know exist]
Salwela inkuleleko [to fight for freedom]

— Amandla, ‘Sobashiya Abazali Ekhaya’

The women that joined uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) were known as ‘Flowers of the Nation’ and ‘Mzana’ (Cock 1991; Dlodlo 2011, 2020; Mtintso 2016). Ayanda Dlodlo explains the origin of the first of these names:

President OR Tambo dubbed the women of uMkhonto we Sizwe the flowers of the revolution, an honour that – a badge that we wear with honour today. If anybody calls me a flower

of a revolution or calls – uMzana womkhonto, flowers of the revolution, to them this is what our father, our leader, one of Africa's best and illustrious leaders, Comrade Oliver Tambo, branded us as women of uMkhonto we Sizwe (Dlodlo 2020).

Thandi Modise explains that the name of the separate barracks for women in the military camps in Angola was 'Mzana', which means 'the small home' (Curnow 2000: 38). Modise found the label 'Mzana' diminishing of women's roles because she understood it to mean that a woman's house was smaller than that of a man and therefore 'not even a home'. Thenjiwe Mtintso (2016) reasons that 'some other aspects of patriarchy worked to advantage women' because the Flowers of the Nation/Mzana were at times 'put in the front for exercises such as marching, running', so they 'could determine the pace'. While MK barracks, as places to sleep, were separated by gender, this does not mean that women had their own military detachments or units; military units in MK were made up of both women and men. Other guerrilla armies in southern Africa had separate women's detachments, such as the Liberation Front of Mozambique (FRELIMO), which formed the Destacamento Feminino in 1967 (see West 2000: 183).

In her thesis about the translation strategies of A.C. Jordan's *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya* (first published in 1940) and its English version, *The Wrath of the Ancestors* (1968), Amanda Nokele (2005: 42) offers an alternative explanation: 'Mzana is a term used for a female hostel in educational institutions. This is a term that was coined by students and has become part of student culture'. In Jordan's novel, 'Mzana' refers to the 'Women's Residence at Lovedale [College]' in Qonce (formerly King William's Town, Eastern Cape) (Jordan 1968: 53). In the English translation, the term 'Mzana' is retained. In the isiXhosa version, the term even appears in a title of one of the chapters '*UZwelinzima eMzana*' to refer to the character's visit from Fort Hare University to a residence at Lovedale College. Tellingly, Chris Hani, Thabo Mbeki and Charles Nqakula are among the exiled African National Congress (ANC) and MK members who went to school at Lovedale College.

The historian Nomathamsanqa Tisani explains that this term was commonly used when she was in high school in the 1960s, but it was not

used when she was at university at Fort Hare.¹ My mother, who was in boarding school in the 1970s at Ntsonkotha High School in Lady Frere (Eastern Cape), shared that their girl's residence was also called eMzana. This gives the impression that *mzana* has mostly been used to refer to women's residences in high schools in the Eastern Cape.

The term lives on – a student in my postgraduate class who attended Queenstown Girls High School in Komani (formerly Queenstown, Eastern Cape) recalled that they were also called Mzana. When she asked her former classmates if they knew the history and meaning of the term, most of them said that they assumed that they were called Mzana because their school was a girls' school. The student's former isiXhosa teacher explained that *mzana* is a term of respect (*isihlonipho*), which refers to 'a place that is for women and headed by women'.²

Tisani also pointed me to Bible verses where the term is mentioned in the isiXhosa Bible – Luke 19:30, Matthew 21:1–11 and Mark 11:1–10.³ In these verses, Jesus is travelling to Jerusalem when he reaches the Mount of Olives and instructs two of his disciples to 'go to the village' to find a colt that has never been ridden and bring it to him. The isiXhosa version says:

Hambani niye emzaneni lo ukhangelene nani; nothi nakungena kuwo, nifumane ithole le-esile libotshelwe, ekungazanga kuhlale namnye umntu phezu kwalo; likhululeni nilizise.

In the isiXhosa version, *emzaneni* is used for 'village'. It perhaps shows that the term refers to a place, but its use in the Bible does not carry a gendered connotation, which points to the term's historical dynamism. My own colloquial understanding of the term is that it is used to refer to the home of a woman who has a relationship with a married man. While in a polygamous context one may refer to a 'senior house' as *indlu enkulu* of the first wife and the smaller house of the second wife as *endlini encinci*, *mzana* would be used to refer to the home of a woman outside

1. Email communication with Nomathamsanqa Tisani, 4 May 2022.

2. Email communication with Nomvelo Fani, 27 April 2022.

3. Email communication with Nomathamsanqa Tisani, 4 May 2022.

of marriage. In all these interpretations, except the biblical one, *mzana* refers to a place where a woman or women dwell.

The term emerges from a social context among amaXhosa whose social world is characterised by complementary gendered stratification that is defined by seniority. In her seminal work about the Yoruba society in Nigeria, Oyèrónkẹ Oyěwùmí (1997) argues that in pre-colonial Yoruba society lineage and seniority were the organising principles of sociocultural life, rather than gender. Among amaXhosa today, cultural rituals and religious activities are stratified according to gender and seniority – boy/girl as *intwanal/intwanazana*, young man/woman as *umfanal/intombi*, man/woman as *indodal/umfazi*, father/mother as *umamal/utata*, grandfather/grandmother as *utat'mkhulu/umakhulu* (see Dana 2022). For instance, in *Ingqumbo Yeminyanya*, Jordan (1940) signals that he is referring to a girl child when he uses the term *intwazana*, as opposed to *intombi*. In many cultural and religious activities there are distinct roles for *iintombi* and *abafana* (young women and men) and roles for *oomama* and *ootata*, older women and men. These categories are fluid – a married woman might be part of *oomama* in her married home and become part of *iintombi* or *inkazana* (an older woman) in her patrilineage.

What the term *mzana* may also reveal is the 'female orientation' or 'matricentric principle in household organization' among amaXhosa (Amadiume 1987: 27). Ifi Amadiume (1987) argues that among the Nnobi in pre-colonial Nigeria, 'the gender ideology governing economic production was that of female industriousness'. Amadiume's work challenges assumptions that matrifocality (female orientation) can only exist in the absence of patriarchy. She argues that among the Nnobi was a 'dual-sex organizational principle behind the structure of the economy, which was supported by various gender ideologies'. I have argued elsewhere that definitions of girlhood/womanhood among amaXhosa are defined by women's ability to show diligence and activity – *ukukhuthala* – in the socio-political economy of the homestead (Magadla 2017; see also Bank 2020; Steele and Minkley 2021; Jimlongo 2021). Girls/women are expected to be economically industrious in the building and maintenance of the homestead – *umzi*. It is an insult to a Xhosa girl/woman to be called *ivila* – the lazy one. This is contrary

to understandings of African girlhood as ‘passive and innocent’ (Bridger 2021: 42).

As Thabo Seshoka explains, a homestead, *umzi*, is ‘a large grouping of family sub-units in a particular area that comes together to form a collective social, political and economic unit while their status is often differentiated in terms of wealth and unit size’ (2017: 63). Douglas Carver argues that ‘the homestead and its constellation of households is the center of Xhosa life’ (2008: 4). Mark Hunter’s research in KwaZulu-Natal shows that among amaZulu, too, the maintenance of the homestead is a dual gender project, from ‘men’s perspectives, key to finding a wife was watching an actual or potential girlfriend’s behavior to see if she showed respect (had *inhlonipho*) and was hardworking (*khuthele*)’ (2010: 43–4).

If we imagine the nation as the larger homestead that survives and thrives through the activity and diligence of women and men of different ages and seniority, perhaps we can get a better understanding of the significance of the discursive travelling of the term *mzana* from the Eastern Cape to Angola and beyond. *Mzana*, understood from the social world it emerges from, perhaps tells us that women guerrillas were expected to display diligence and activity in the fight for national liberation. In this social world, the fight for national liberation is a dual task that relies on women and men as gendered subjects, with specific gender defined roles.

These gender-defined roles might be what Dlodlo refers to when she says that she was proud to be called ‘uMzana womkhonto’ because

it came with its own burden of a particular *behaviour*, of a particular *demeanour*, of a particular *posture* that had to resemble the aspirations and hopes of our people and that we needed to carry that through the way that we did things. The way that we postured, the way that we spoke, the way that we articulated the struggle for liberation of the people of South Africa (2020; emphasis added).

MK women resisted qualifiers such ‘she comrades’ and ‘lady soldiers’. They wanted to be referred to as soldiers. Yet, they also did not wish to erase their femininity. They insisted that they were full soldiers, like men,

without losing their claim to full womanhood. The struggle by women to make MK responsive to women's specific reproductive needs is illustrative of the tension between women's claim to equality as soldiers and the specific needs they had as women who depended on their organisation to respond to those material needs. Access to sanitary towels, contraceptives and how MK addressed women's pregnancies became core issues that illuminated women's ability to agitate for gendered transformation in MK. Despite women's desire to be treated as equals, their experiences show that ideas of heterosexual femininity dominated in MK and the ANC. Women carried the primary responsibility for preventing pregnancy and biological mothers or other women took the primary responsibility of childcare, while the 'roles or expectations of men as fathers, partners, carers or progenitors [were] invisible' (Tsampiras 2012: 654).

The other issue that illuminates women's gendered experiences is their deployment to combat and the definition of combat. MK women complained that few women were deployed for missions inside South Africa, a process that was called *umtshayina*. They argued that women guerrillas were more suitable to be infiltrated into South Africa because, as women, they would be less suspected by the apartheid regime. Women's contribution to combat relied on both their military training and a dynamic use of womanhood. Totsie Memela and Dipuo Mvelase's roles in Operation Vula, discussed below, demonstrate exactly this intersection.

Raymond Suttner's (2005) work on ANC masculinities shows that participating in national liberation gave men access to culturally acceptable protective manhood. For example, Suttner tells a story of a community in Dinokana, a village in Lehurutshe, near Zeerust, in North West Province, that was contesting the Bantu Authority, the removal of their chief and the extension of passes to women. To defend their community, between 50 and 80 boys were encouraged to join MK. According to Phaladi Sebate, the boys were told that it was the time of the '*bolala*', which meant that they 'had to go out to be initiated in the teachings of MK so that they could be men amongst men' (Suttner 2005: 81). Joining MK, and sacrificing undergoing traditional initiation, 'provided elements of what was required in their transition to manhood'.

After 1976, some young men who were sent to Robben Island before they had undergone circumcision, were circumcised by Johnson Malcomess Mgabela, who claims to have conducted 361 circumcisions on Robben Island (Suttner 2005: 84). The new initiates were counselled by older prisoners about 'how they should conduct themselves as men' (Suttner 2005: 85). While Suttner explains that some ANC/MK members were circumcised at the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College in Tanzania, the practice does not appear to have been as frequent as was the case on Robben Island, as 'many people, some as old as 40, were initiated on their return to South Africa' (Suttner 2005: 86). The Dinokana and Robben Island experiences show the intersection of national liberation and ideas of culturally approved manhood.

This chapter focuses on the experiences of the MK women who received guerrilla training in countries such as Angola, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR, now Russia), the German Democratic Republic (also referred to as East Germany) and Cuba. This is because I only interviewed two women from the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) who were trained outside of South Africa – Nomvo Booi and Joyce Sifuba. In the next chapter, I provide more details about women who participated in the armed struggle inside South Africa as part of the Pan Africanist Congress's (PAC's) armed wing, Poqo, in 1963 and beyond.

Leaving South Africa: Political activity, harassment, detention and torture

The narratives of women who became guerrillas make it clear that they did so because of personal and communal experiences of daily violence. Throughout the 1960s, and until 1994, in spite of the banning of the ANC and PAC, women continued to be involved in various underground political activities. Underground mobilisation was one of the four pillars that the ANC adopted in its 1969 consultative conference in Morogoro, Tanzania. Suttner notes that 'underground work is political activity that is not open or openly declared for what it is. Under the cover of doing one thing, one may in fact also be performing an activity below the surface, and not visibly' (2003a: 126). The early

sabotage campaigns of MK depended on the intricate collaboration of underground combatants, who were not trained in either conventional or guerrilla warfare, to carry out the sabotage campaigns that targeted 'military installations, power plants, telephone lines and transportation links', aiming to 'scare away foreign capital, and weaken the economy' (Mandela 1995: 336). After 1976, underground work became more dangerous, as those who participated in it were subjected to routine police harassment and detention. As the descriptions of their experiences below show, many of them were involved in student organisations in schools and universities, which they combined with covert underground work, including cross-border travel between South Africa and countries such as Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland. Following threats of detention and, in most cases, instances of detention and torture, they relied on ANC underground networks to find their way out of South Africa.

Although I focus on MK women in the 1970s and 1980s, women joined MK from its inception. Ruth Mompoti left South Africa in 1962 and received military training in the Soviet Union for a year (Mompoti 2008: 315; Houston and Magubane 2006). Jackie Sedibe was seventeen years old when she left South Africa to receive training in the Soviet Union in 1964. Most of the women I interviewed joined MK between 1980 and 1987. Among those I interviewed who joined MK in the late 1970s were Thandi Modise, Dr Pumza Dyantyi, Phumla Mgaba and Belinda Martin.

The 1970s: Pumza Dyantyi, Belinda Martin, Phumla Mgaba, Thandi Modise and Thenjiwe Mtintso

Pumza Patricia Dyantyi (*nom de guerre* Alice Tsongo), born in 1948, started being involved in politics when she was in high school at Cicirha College in Mthatha, Eastern Cape. She comes from the Quthubeni location, Engcobo, which is also the home of Walter Sisulu. She told me that although there was 'momentum about the struggle', she became politically active in the ANC underground when she was working at Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg from 1968 to 1972. At Baragwanath, she worked with Nomazotho Gqabi, the wife of Joe Gqabi. It was at this time that she worked for the ANC, travelling underground

to 'Botswana carrying literature that was banned here in the country for cells that we had, underground cells' (Dyantyi, interview). In 1972 she moved to Durban and studied midwifery with Nosidima Pityana, the wife of Barney Pityana, who was a member of the National Youth Organisation (NAYO), founded in 1973. Through her connection with Nosidima, she became close to Barney and Steve Biko, leaders of the Black Consciousness Movement. From Durban, she was placed in Kuruman, in the Northern Cape. It was there that she first became involved with MK:

So, I started being involved with MK there. Soldiers would enter the country from underground. They would be hidden there. We would look after them there with a family and they would proceed from there. We were doing this work, travelling up and down between Botswana and South Africa. Sometimes we would be carrying letters; sometimes we would courier things that were not disclosed to us. You would learn later that you were actually carrying a lot of money inside the country. I was arrested around this time (Dyantyi, interview).

In 'The ANC Political Underground in the 1970s', Gregory Houston and Bernard Magubane explain that groups such as NAYO that became involved in the ANC underground travelled to countries such as 'Botswana and Swaziland, where they obtained banned literature from ANC people like Isaac Makopo and Keith Mokoape in Botswana, and Stanley Mabizela and Moses Mabhida in Swaziland' (2006: 383). They point out that

between June and October 1975, the majority of the leaders of the Ekukhanyeni Youth Club, NAYO and several other organisations were arrested, and later brought to trial in Johannesburg. The seven accused in the NAYO trial were Joseph Molokeng, Amos Masondo, Andrew Moletsane, Bheki Langa, Pumza Dyan[t]yi, David Nhlapo and Benjamin Mafenjane (Houston and Magubane 2006: 383).

Dyantyi recounts her arrest:

I was arrested while I was traveling from holidays at home in Transkei. I met the Boers at the train station in Gauteng. They arrested me there. And some of the people that I worked with underground, when I arrived in Gauteng, it turned out that they were already arrested. We were known as the 'NAYO Seven' . . . We were charged under the Terrorism Act and sent to John Vorster Square. The trial carried on. Out of seven, two people were convicted. One of them was the [former] mayor of Gauteng, Amos Masondo. But it is clear to me that this thing was following me, because even after I was acquitted, I was arrested at the stairs on my way home. I was arrested for something funny called 'inciting people by writing letters' – something like that. They just wanted to arrest me. But then I managed to get out (Dyantyi, interview).

Following three months at John Vorster Square, she received a banning order, banishing her to the Transkei (see Chapter 2 for a brief history of banishment in South Africa). Dyantyi never served the banning order, as she managed to leave the country by 'posing as a pregnant woman with books in her belly' in 1978 (Stage Elements 2020). She spent time in Mozambique, then in Lusaka, Zambia, and eventually went to train with MK in the Benguela camp in Angola. In our recorded interview, Dyantyi indicated that Benguela was her place of training, but in the reading of her obituary in December 2020, Nova Catengue is stated as the MK camp where she received training. As already noted in the Introduction, this research is a continuous process of fact checking of the basic particulars of combatants, including their names, birthplaces, the camps that they trained in and when they returned to South Africa. Sometimes in one record, the combatant mentions one of the camps that they were trained in, and in others they mention various other camps.

Another combatant who joined MK in the 1970s is Belinda Martin. She was born in 1952 in Kliptown, Johannesburg. She spoke about the separation of her racially mixed family – that saw family members classified as 'Coloured', along with her black grandmother, moved to

Soweto – as a motivating factor to her involvement in the liberation struggle. Martin became active as part of a youth group called the Anti-Collaborationist Front (AFRO), which was formed by coloured students at Coronation High School. According to Martin, the group was affiliated with the Black People's Convention and was mentored by the activist-poet and journalist Don Mattera. Martin was detained in 1975 after leaking information to Mattera, who was then working as a journalist for the *Star* newspaper. She left the country to join MK following detention and solitary confinement in John Vorster Square (now Johannesburg Central Police Station):

1975, I was detained. I was on the run for about six months. Six months I was on the run, after that article was exposed in the newspaper because I was the main investigator and I had to do the article and filter it to Don Mattera, who was then working at the *Star*. So that is how I ended up being detained. Well, it was horrible in detention. I was tortured severely and I was made to watch other activists being tortured, to try and make me betray my comrades. And throughout my detention, I decided I'm not going to say a word, no matter how severe. I can rather die . . . Severe beatings, making me stand on ice bricks, beating me with the butt of the gun, marks on my legs of the . . . you can see they are growing faint now, of the electrocution that I was exposed to while they were torturing me . . . Solitary confinement, and for three weeks, while I was in that cell, they never allowed me to wash or have a shower. I was pregnant three months . . . I had a miscarriage and I remained with the foetus in the cell. It started rotting and smelling until one of the matrons couldn't stand it any longer . . . so she took out the foetus and she cleaned the cell and she smuggled me to the shower. After three weeks, I was smelling – and I had to drink water out of the toilet (Martin, interview).

In her article about women detainees in the anti-apartheid struggle, Kalpana Hiralal notes that throughout anti-apartheid struggle, 'thousands of women were arrested, subjected to naked body searches, physical

torture, verbal abuse and sexual harassment' (2015: 36). As she further points out, since the 1960s, women's imprisonment and treatment as prisoners has not received the same attention as that of male political activists. For instance, parallel to the Rivonia trial, political activist Dorothy Nyembe was sentenced to ten years in prison in Kroonstad. This is the Dorothy that Duduzile Ndelu is referring to in the 'Fighting Woman', the poem that opens this chapter. Yet,

during this time the Rivonia trials received world attention and together with the struggles of inmates on Robben Island it subsequently led to improved conditions on the Island. Dorothy's imprisonment on the other hand, received scant attention; even her family did not support her since it was regarded as unacceptable for a woman to be in prison (Hiralal 2015: 35).

As Martin's case shows, women detainees were subjected to torture and body searches by males. Hiralal explains that 'in detention sexual abuse was a powerful weapon that the police used against women' (2015: 40). In the deeply moving essays in Diana Russell's *Lives of Courage: Women for a New South Africa* (1989), Elaine Mohamed tells a story of a woman who was arrested in 1976 and was interrogated by nine policemen in her first night:

They said, 'If you don't talk, we're going to rape you, one after the other.' She replied, 'Oh great! The laws in this country never allowed me to have sex with a white guy. Who's going to be first?' And she started taking her clothes off, which totally shocked these guys, and they didn't do it (Russell 1989: 37–8).

One can only wonder if this had been the woman's first time being arrested, or whether she had been arrested so often that she had learnt ways to respond to the police to protect herself and hopefully avoid sexual violence. Mohamed also shared that she knew of 'someone who had rats pushed into her vagina as a means of torturing her' (Russell 1989: 38). During solitary confinement, Mohamed herself was 'body-searched twice a day every day'. She was made to 'stand astride and do star jumps to check that [she] wasn't hiding anything in [her] vagina'.

She remembers being made to strip by policewomen ‘in front of men’ (Russell 1989: 39).

In ‘Gender and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’ submitted to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by Beth Goldblatt and Sheila Meintjies (1996), Thenjiwe Mtintso (*nom de guerre*, Molly) speaks painfully about how women activists were brutalised and humiliated by the apartheid security branch because they were women. Mtintso was born in Orlando East, Soweto on 7 November 1949. In 1973, she was a student at Fort Hare University and an active member of the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO), which led to her expulsion from Fort Hare. From 1973 until 1976, she was an active member of the Black People’s Convention. From 1975 to 1976, she worked as a journalist for the *Daily Dispatch* newspaper, under the editorship of Donald Woods. She was active as a member of the Union of Black Journalists. In his memoir, *The People’s War: Reflections of an ANC Cadre*, Charles Nqakula writes that ‘while still working for the *Dispatch*, Mtintso led the move in 1976 to organise Black journalists in the Border region into the Union of Black Journalists’ (2017: 87). He explains:

Our orientation was clear: we were Black before we were journalists. We lived with our people in the locations the government had consigned us to. Our stance, therefore, was that we would write the South Africa story as experienced by our people – including ourselves – in every corner of South Africa . . . Among the intellectual heavyweights in our ranks were Seatlhlole, Sisulu, Mattera, Mayet, Mtintso, Mazwai (Nqakula 2017: 94).

Mtintso’s activism led to multiple police detentions, torture and banishment to Orlando East, Soweto, from 1976 until 1978.⁴ She explains her experience of torture as having been directed to her womanhood:

4. See Thenjiwe Mtintso’s curriculum vitae: http://www.dirco.gov.za/madrid/en/documents/2020/march/cv_ambassador_mtintso.pdf.

Anger at me . . . for not fitting the stereotype of this woman who was going to break down . . . so they got very angry that I was thinking that I was a man. It was always 'You think you are a man, you think you are strong. We are going to bring you down. We've brought down better people than yourself, men, strong men.' . . . This is where they actually use your womanhood. For instance, they would let you stand for the whole day and you would not be allowed to go to a toilet or anything and it gets to a point where you can't hold on so you will wee-wee standing there. And all of them will be coming in and out just laughing at this woman who just pees anywhere. Around menstruation – because at some stage you've just got to menstruate. You are just like this in a cell and there is nothing and you are going to come in stinking obviously . . . after a month of wearing those pants it is hard here and so as you walk . . . and stink. That is the humiliation then where your womanhood is used. 'You are useless. These men who sleep with you. Look at you how you smell' (in Goldblatt and Meintjes 1996).

Mtintso goes on to talk about how she and other women activists were also targeted as mothers. As Goldblatt and Meintjes point out in their report, 'the police obviously realised that the best way to weaken women detainees was to make them believe that their children were dead or dying. This would play into their worst fears as mothers and expose their deepest vulnerabilities' (1996). Mtintso talked about this very thing in her own experience:

When I was detained my son was nine months and I left him in bed . . . One day they came in with a big photo in the *Daily Dispatch* that showed a red Volkswagen that had been smashed and I had a red Volkswagen at that time. They said to me 'You see, that is your car . . . one of your colleagues was driving your car with your son inside and we were chasing him and that's what happened to your car and your son is dead there.' . . . That stayed with me for the rest of my stay in prison. They would not say, 'No, he is not dead.' They just continued beating me up,

beating me up . . . I don't know what it would have done to a man, but that was one way of getting to a woman (in Goldblatt and Meintjes 1996).

Mtintso left South Africa for exile in 1978, when she joined MK and held various positions in the ANC and the South African Communist Party (SACP) in Lesotho, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Lusaka, Angola, Mozambique and Uganda. From 1985 to 1992, she was the ANC's chief representative in Uganda and acted as the regional MK commander.

As discussed in the Introduction, Thandi Modise was part of the 1976 detachment. She left the country 'in group of ten school children' (Cock 1991: 151). Modise trained at MK's Nova Catengue camp in Angola.

Phumla Mgaba (*nom de guerre* Phumla Williams), who was also trained in Nova Catengue, left South Africa in 1978. She was born Phumla Sara Mgaba in June 1948 in Lundini, New Brighton, in what was then Port Elizabeth (now Gqeberha). She went to school at Johnson Primary and Clarkbury. She then went on to study at the University of Transkei (currently Walter Sisulu University), where she studied to be a teacher. She said that she was introduced to politics by an uncle who was politically active and who would tell her and her seven siblings what was going on (Mgaba, interview). She taught for five years in a school in Maxhwele, Viedgesville, in Mthatha, until the pressure from the police became unbearable for her. She said that 'teaching those days was another form of torture' (Mgaba interview). The police used to harass the schools all the time and the students looked to her for protection. Regarding how she came to decide to leave South Africa, she recounted hiding from the police in her family dog's kennel:

I was part of a group in 1978. We observed what happened in 1976 and then after there was a lot of time, you would say who you were going with and that you are not living well, you want to leave and carry the gun yourself, you see? Beyond the gun, there was also a lot of harassment. At home we could not discuss what was happening, there was no open discussion. But also, I did not want to put my family in danger. I remember one day

they arrived at home, our dog at home stays at the back, I was a slender then before I was bigger. I also have instincts, very strong instincts. I had a feeling that they had arrived . . . I went to the doghouse as they were arriving . . . They knocked and my mother opened and they checked. My mother said, 'No, I do not know. I do not know where she is.' They left. At the time my heart was beating fast as if they were going to search the doghouse, but I was trusting that the dog was in front. Then they left . . . I realised that things were not well . . . So, you realised that you must link with people who know how to leave because you cannot just go because you need a channel. So, when the date arrives you realise that I'm going. You left like that (Mgaba, interview).

Indeed, all the women combatants emphasised that they had to make connections within the ANC underground network to plan their departure. But they had to leave with as little as possible, often with only the clothes on their bodies, so as not to raise the suspicions of the police.

By the 1980s township uprisings across South Africa had intensified. As the students of 1976 had done, thousands of young people were thrust into daily confrontations with the apartheid security forces. Many, like the women below, eventually escaped South Africa to receive military training.

The 1980s: Nomfundiso Kulati, Brenda Badela, Nomsa Ngcipe and Makhosazana Xaba

In her case study of Diepkloof Township, Soweto, Monique Marks points out that 'most township youth who joined political organizations in the '80s, were *at school*, and many of the leaders of these organisations were still at school' (2001: 49; emphasis added). She argues that schools provided a 'base for a common experience and also a geographical space for meeting and organizing'. Many were active in the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), such as Nomfundiso Kulati (nom de guerre Thabisa Skhulu), who was born in 1969 and became involved when she was at Nathaniel Nyaluza High School in Makhanda (formerly Grahamstown):

In terms of understanding the aims and objectives of COSAS, at first, I never thought they would be that revolutionary, but as I grew into the organisation I learnt it was more than that, just a student organisation. I remember when my mom, I told my mom having joined the Congress of South African Student movement, my mom said, 'Eh, I hope that this thing will not organise boycotts in schools.' I said, 'No, this thing is not organising boycotts. This thing is about talking about, you remember, this overcrowding in classrooms. This thing is about shortage' – of issues we were really dealing with. I mean, there was a shortage of textbooks, overcrowding of classes and corporal punishments were kind of our daily challenges in our schools. Shortage of teachers and black schools generally were not really being attended to during the days of apartheid . . . And then this then became more political in a way and we started to demand a non-racial and free education for all through the existence of SRCs [students representative councils] in schools, you know. And this organisation started to organise congresses now. So, I was growing politically because my exposure now with other people of my age and understanding throughout the country as to what is happening in different schools was being broadened, by attending various conferences and congresses of COSAS (Kulati, interview).

Kulati's involvement in COSAS led to her detention in 1985, at the age of sixteen:

Remember, we called for boycotts when we were demanding students representative councils. Then, you know, remember the system, how they would deal with us – they would harass [and] they wouldn't listen to us. They would chase us and we would be identified as the troublemakers and we were already labelled as terrorists then. So, I was more of a target in my area and I was often detained, harassed. I never slept home. I would run away. We never owned a house then . . . we lived in a backyard shack in someone's house. We used to move from

one home to another . . . don't know how many backyards I have stayed in Grahamstown alone. And eh, but then this led me to my being detained and I ended up in solitary confinement in Rooi Prison [also known as 'Red Hell' or 'North End' Prison, in Port Elizabeth]. This was now about 1985. After being tortured harassed and . . . Remember, the system, the way it would respond to us as young people. They would kill and shoot and hit people and we were already identified as the people that 'are troublemakers' and 'terrorist people', that were being 'used by Oliver Tambo, wah, wah, wah' (Kulati, interview).

After coming out of close to a year of solitary confinement, Kulati states that she discovered that she had been expelled by the Department of Education. With no way to complete high school, she says that she felt that she 'was left with no choice but to leave South Africa'. She left the country in 1986, through Lesotho. She was then 'cleared' to go to Angola for training by 'Comrades Thenjiwe Mtintso and Nosiviwe Nqakula, they cleared me that I was not being used by the system' (Kulati, interview). She ended up in the MK camp Caculama, in eastern Angola, in 1987.

Another MK recruit who chose to leave the country after several arrests and torture is Brenda Badela. She got into politics because her home was a meeting space for activists as a result of the leadership that her father provided in the community. Her father, the activist-journalist Mono Badela, was known to support trade unions, the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO), COSAS and the United Democratic Front (UDF) in Port Elizabeth while working for the *Evening Post* and later *City Press* newspapers (Mutasa 2003). Brenda Badela notes:

I had quite a number of friends who were members of COSAS and because my dad was a leader, a political leader at that time. So they would come to my house, discuss politics and then I happened to have interest in that and that is how I went into politics. And besides that, because my dad was a journalist, he would actually write negative things about the government but positive things about the ANC and so he was then banned (Badela, interview).

As a result of her active political participation, Badela was in and out of detention between 1981 and 1983. Her family home was petrol-bombed in 1985, allegedly by members of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) in the 'inter-organisational conflict in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage area' from 1985 to 1986 (TRC 1998: 96). Badela told me of her time in solitary confinement and how she learnt about the bombing of her home:

During detention I was in solitary confinement in Algoa. That's where my home is now. Every time I pass that police station, I laugh. I was all by myself, solitary confinement, all of us, because we were regarded as the most influential and most dangerous COSAS leaders at the time. You know, the treatment was very bad because one of the guys who was torturing me is actually late now, [Gideon] Nieuwoudt. Nieuwoudt was actually involved in the killing of the late Siphiso Mthimkhulu, you know, Goniwe. He was very, very notorious but he has since died now. So, you know, they would either not give me food, give me water for three days, you know, take me to their rooms, torturing me, slapping me, you know, asking me many questions, thinking that you are hiding something, you are working for ANC underground, asking for some people I don't even know, you know, 'Where is so-and-so, where is so-and-so? You are working with so-and-so underground', you know. So, ja, the torture was terrible, yo! Hm! And, eh, in my cell, I had, eh, fortunately it was a small cell, but I had a toilet, which was much better and I had a shower. So, there wasn't, there was no bed. We would sleep on the cement, but they gave us, you know the grey . . . those grey blankets, for us to put some on the cement, for us to sleep. Yo, those days were bad, yo! Whilst you are sleeping, at two o'clock, they would just come and kick your door. You were not allowed to close the door. You are allowed to, if it's the door, you must sleep here, and the door must be wide open, because every time when the guard is passing, you know the security, they must make sure you are still there, you are still breathing. You know they would call your name from a distance, 'Hey, Brenda', you know, and

then you have to respond and say, 'Yes, Sir', you know, then they just pass. So every 30 minutes they do that because there was a period where people were dying in detention, you know. But at the same time, it was a torture because if you are being woken up every 30 minutes, you are not going to sleep (Badela, interview).

She continues to share specifically about hearing about the petrol-bombing of her home:

And then, sometimes, they are going to wake you up and I remember one Friday they called me and said, 'Yo, but your house was bombed, petrol-bombed' and I thought they were joking. My dad was in detention, but my dad was in another police station. But I thought they were joking. 'Ja, your house was petrol-bombed', you know and I'm like, 'Yo, wow! And then what happened?' 'No, nobody died, nobody was hurt.' And I'm telling you, Siphokazi, I didn't know about it until I was out after three months. And when I asked my mom, my mom said, 'Yes, that's what they did.' Fortunately, you know, that we grew up in three-roomed house, so they threw the petrol-bomb in my room. But we had two single rooms, myself and my brother, the one who comes after me. It landed on top of my brother's bed, but fortunately, because me and my dad were in detention, my mom and my two brothers were sleeping in the main bedroom. Now, if Phiko had slept there, it would have been something else. And they said, 'Ja, and your brother was here, but we released them because we told them, "No, but his dad and his sister are already in detention".' You know, there was a time when they would go house-to-house and take people in the police van, take them to the police station and torture them for unknown reasons (Badela, interview).

At the time, the state had two cases against Badela. In one, she had been caught carrying banned literature in Queenstown (now Komani) on the way back home to Gqeberha from a COSAS congress in Durban. The second case involved the arrest of the COSAS executive, including

Pamela Nombeko Daniels (who was not an executive member), the so-called COSAS Nine. In its 1985 annual report, the Southern Africa Project, which was a group of American lawyers that provided financial support for legal representation in political trials in South Africa and Namibia, details its support for ‘children on trial’ in *State v. Brenda Badela and 10 Others*, who were ‘charged with offenses arising from a police raid on a COSAS committee meeting in December 1984. The police attempted to arrest without warrant COSAS members present at the December 2nd meeting, but the students stood their ground refusing to be intimidated’ (Southern African Project 1986: 16–17). Following the bombing of their home, the Badela family moved to Johannesburg. Badela escaped the country with her fellow COSAS Nine accused, who joined her in Johannesburg. They first stayed at Winnie Madikizela-Mandela’s home in Brandfort, where she had been banished. It was Madikizela-Mandela who organised their escape to Lesotho. Badela told me that she decided to leave the country because she was in and out of detention and because of the fact that her home had burned down. She could see that ‘the system at the time really meant something; they really wanted to kill [her] family at the time’ (Badela, interview).

As arrests became more violent and frequent in the 1970s and 1980s, it justified the decisions of thousands of women, like Brenda Badela and Nomfundiso Kulati to leave the country.

In *For the Fallen: Honouring the Unsung Heroes and Heroines of the Liberation Struggle* (2013), Mzwakhe Ndllela recounts the life of Bantwini Norman ‘Totose’ Ngcipe, who was among the 42 people who were killed by the South African Defence Force (SADF) in Maseru, Lesotho, on the morning of 9 December 1982. According to Ndllela, ‘Totose Ngcipe influenced many young people from his hometown, Somerset East, and beyond, to join the struggle for freedom’ (2013: 21). He recalls that Totose’s sister, Nomsa, and another family member ‘collapsed on hearing the news of their brother’s death’. Nomsa Ngcipe told me that after the killing of her brother, she was abused in boarding school because of her family name. She felt that the family involvement in politics destined her for political life:

My brother was killed during the Maseru massacre. What happened was that it became well known that there were a whole

lot of people who were killed during the Maseru massacre – it was in the newspapers and my surname was in the newspapers. So, when I got to school, I arrived already having a wrong reputation because of my surname. Even though they did not know me, but because of my surname was known as one of those who come from families who are active in the struggle, those who are considered problematic by the system. That is why even the administration there had an attitude towards me because of my surname. So, in a way, I didn't have a choice. I had to be involved in the struggle whether I liked it or didn't because my surname had already spoilt things for me (Ngcipe, interview).

Ngcipe became involved in political activities in school 'to defeat the system' (Ngcipe, interview). She realised that she was going to be 'hunted down at school and arrested'. Her escape was arranged by Makhenkesi Stofile, who organised for her passport in the Transkei, from where she left for Lesotho, under the pretence that she was going to attend a show by Brenda Fassie. She was nineteen years old when she arrived in Lesotho in 1984. She left Lesotho in November 1985 for the ANC's Dakawa camp in Tanzania, and eventually received military training in the Viana camp in Angola. She says she chose military training instead of continuing with school:

At the time I chose that I would go and fight. I would train because I was so bitter because my brother was the breadwinner at home. I realised that everyone was angry that they took away our breadwinner. I needed to revenge his death. So, I decided to go to the army (Ngcipe, interview).

Although Makhosazana Xaba was 29 years old when she escaped South Africa, she had been motivated by the Soweto student uprisings of 1976 to become politically involved and eventually work for the ANC underground until her departure from South Africa in 1986. Xaba was born in 1957 in Greytown but grew up in Ndaleni, near Richmond, in the KwaZulu-Natal Midlands. She recounted that it was during her time as a junior in Polela High School that she first heard about Steve

Biko and Black Consciousness through the school's debating team. She notes that 'for some reason, the debating students – they were often the senior students – were allowed to discuss political topics' (Xaba, interview). She explained that it was at Inanda Seminary that she openly engaged in politics and that there was a 'much more open – even from the teachers – an open engagement with politics'. Even though she wrote her Matric exams in 1975, she spent the whole of 1976 nursing an undiagnosed illness, while her peers were either at university or starting their careers. It was the Soweto uprising that energised and compelled her to action:

So, when June 16 happened, everybody would leave me in the morning to go to school – my parents and my sibling – and return in the afternoon . . . So I just always used to listen to the radio. I was either listening to the radio or reading, lying on my back. I couldn't do anything . . . And then I'd listened to this thing about what had happened in Soweto and I'm thinking: damn, this is terrible, you know. So I just remember that time because I had been ill and I was depressed and that was a terrible year for me, because my age mates were either at varsity or starting their careers. I really wasn't feeling good about myself. But when that happened, everything just seemed to change because it was like, 'Wow, I can do something in the world', you know (Xaba, interview).

She went on to train as a nurse at Edendale Hospital in 1977. Following the killing of Steve Biko, she joined the Edendale Youth Organisation with some doctors who had been friends with Biko. The organisation was a space for political education and discussion. She notes that Ben Martins (a former Minister of Energy after 1994) used to supply banned literature to the group. After serving as a nurse in a small hospital in the very impoverished area of Khombe, in what was then northern Natal, she decided to pursue her Bachelor of Nursing Administration and Education at Ongoye University (University of Zululand), where she became an active member of the Azanian Students' Organisation (AZASO). She was particularly influenced by the events of 29 October 1983 that led to

the deaths of five people, including students, in a confrontation between UDF-aligned students and an estimated 500 members of the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) who entered the university (South African History Online 1983).⁵ She was one of seven students who were expelled by the university for her involvement in the events. It was at this time that she decided she wanted to go into military training outside the country. During the 2021 colloquium “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’, Xaba further explained the significance of the Ongoye massacre in her decision to join MK:

I can point to a date. On the 29th of October 1983, members of Inkatha, *impi*, came to university at Ongoye. By the end of that day, four students had died and one other person. I made the decision on that day; I will be looking to join – I was never recruited to MK. On that day, I decided I will ask people until somebody tells me who to talk to. That’s how I joined MK. Nobody was looking for me to recruit me but that event, when men who look like me came and killed us on our campus. We were university students. I mean, I was much older. I had finished a degree. I had been – I’d finished a diploma. I was in my twenties but university students, they’re nineteen, you know, eighteen, twenty and they came, and these are black men. That, for me, changed a lot of what was in my head because I wasn’t sacrificing myself. It was self-preservation because what I realised on that day is that if I don’t do something to know how to kill and fight back, I’ll die and that would be, for me, a failure on my part, not to have armed myself when experience has shown me that I need to be ready to fight and die fighting. I did not want to die not fighting. So, for me, it’s a story that I can pin to a date, when the shift of my activism moved from just being a student movement and, you know, doing women’s work here and there.

5. On 6 April 2022, Makhosazana Xaba received an honorary Doctor of Law from Rhodes University. In her acceptance speech, she spoke about the significance of the Ongoye massacre for her politicisation and its legacy 39 years later (Rhodes University 2022).

We were doing consciousness raising, 'Black is beautiful, na, na, na; be black and proud.' I was doing that and it was fun, and I thought it was important but on the 29th of October 1983, it is now referred to as the Ongoye massacre, my mind shifted completely because I needed to self-preserve. When people ask me the question it's like, 'How could you sacrifice yourself and go to MK because you were going to die?' I needed to be trained as an MK soldier so I could self-preserve and I acted, and I asked everybody until I was referred to somebody who became my handler.

A friend linked her to a transnational ANC underground operative who was moving between Lusaka and Pietermaritzburg. That person was Kevin Qhobosheane.

I met somebody in December 1984, who was going to be my – what you call them? – my cell leader. I was introduced to him. He was the first person who started training me on the basics of how to use a gun; the basics of doing reconnaissance; the basics of unlocking keys; the basics of dead letter bombs, you know. And we did it in such a fun way, you know. We'd meet at a certain place; we'd take a walk. We'd look like we're having a good picnic, choose a spot, you know. It was just lovely! He was an underground cadre, you know, he moved between Lusaka and Pietermaritzburg. He was in the Natal machinery that was operating from Swaziland under Ronnie [Kasrils], [Jacob] Zuma and [Siphiwe] Nyanda (Xaba, interview).

At the time, she was working in an old age home for whites, where she could only work night duties because black nurses were not allowed to work there. She worked seven nights on, seven nights off. This position and schedule were ideal for her travels between Durban and Swaziland:

The system was, you did seven days on, seven days off. So often during the off nights, that's when I'd take a trip and come back. So, it looked very innocent, you know. I'd come back from a trip.

It was a very convenient because seven days was a good period of time to go do something and come back, you know. So whether I was going to Swaziland or we were just busy with our activities and . . . it was easy . . . was then doing the movements between Swaziland and KZN mostly, as a messenger carrying letters, and coming back with money, because it was difficult to find money to do the work. So I'd go there with some letters and come back. I never carried guns, but I carried money. Loads of money on my body, for the various operations that needed to happen [I would hide] with things like pantyhose and whatever, it's very easy to hide money everywhere. Everywhere on your body, it's very easy, and bags, obviously (Xaba, interview).

Xaba operated between KwaZulu-Natal and Swaziland from December 1984 until December 1986. She notes that, at this time, which was at the height of a state of emergency, she could not attend mass meetings, or be seen to be participating in any political activity. As a nurse, she had the 'perfect' alibi for her underground work. This was until December 1986, when her trainer told her that it was time for her to leave the country. She left the country during the second state of emergency in 1986, through Swaziland, then Mozambique, then Lusaka and straight to the MK camp in Pango in northern Angola.

It was through the strategies and networks of activists both inside South Africa and those who were in countries across the southern African region that the women who joined MK and APLA were able to leave the country. Importantly, the networks that were established underground acted as a check-and-balance system to ensure that those who went into exile were not undercover apartheid agents sent by the state. As Houston and Magubane (2006), Suttner (2008) and Barry Gilder (2012) show in their work, underground work was an intensely transnational process across the southern African region, which relied on the collaboration of different actors in order to achieve a single operation. These actors included the exiled leadership; those who facilitated the connections between those inside and outside; the gatekeepers who protected the security of the liberation movements by verifying the biographies of new recruits; and the members of the local population, who shielded both new and old recruits from being captured.

Choosing a *nom de guerre*

One pitiful scream
 a push
 and the child
 is born
 the future
 OUR SHIELD
 OUR SPEAR
 OUR MK

— Gloria Mtungwa [Belinda Martin], 'A New Child is Born'

Activists who worked underground and those who left South Africa to operate in multiple countries used a *nom de guerre*, a pseudonym, and sometimes they used multiple names, depending on the operation that they were involved in. In hindsight, I wish I had been consistent in asking the MK recruits the names they used and how they came to choose or be given those names. For instance, Pumza Dyantyi said that she adopted the name of Alice Tsongo because:

When I went outside, I left with a fourteen-year-old. And this fourteen-year-old that they thought that I should leave with him was asked the name of the woman in his family that he loves the most, and he said, 'It's sis Alice.' And he was asked what Alice's surname is and he stated it. Then I was given that name (Dyantyi, interview).

Makhosazana Xaba's *nom de guerre* was Nomgqibelo because she arrived at the camps in Angola on a Saturday. Her name while she was working in the underground in Natal was Salome (Xaba, interview). Phumla Mgaba said she kept her first name and used the name Phumla Williams because her grandmother was white (Mgaba, interview). Nomfundiso Kulati's *nom de guerre* became Thabisa Skhulu. Pamela Daniels was Nombeko Msizi, and Weziwe Rachel Ncame was Thabisa Cebokazi Nqabeni (Ncame, interview). Naomi Ribbon Mosholi was Susan Lamu and Sankie Mthembu-Mahanyele was Rebecca Matlou. Mpoetsi Morake says that she was given her new name in Mozambique on the way to

Angola: 'When we arrived in Maputo, we were given names, and I was given Ruth Mantile . . . I thought it was suitable because I knew Ruth Mompati, Ruth First' (Morake, interview). Brenda Badela's MK name Thoko Matthews was given to her by Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, who arranged her escape to Lesotho:

She is the one who organised everything for us to leave the country. We had our passports with our, you know, of course with our pseudo names. From Brandfort we went to Lesotho. So, we left the country using our passports with the wrong names . . . My name was Thoko Matthews (Badela, interview).

Many of the MK recruits would later find out when they returned to South Africa that they shared surnames and/or clan names with some of their comrades, who went by different names, and who would not share family background details for security reasons. The less personal information they shared about themselves, the safer they and their families inside South Africa would be, despite the fact that upon leaving South Africa, in their various countries of transit (Lesotho Botswana, Swaziland), they would be requested to write biographies of themselves to ascertain that they had not been sent by the apartheid government to infiltrate the ANC. Many of them spoke about writing these biographies multiple times as they travelled across various countries before arriving at the military camps in Angola.

With new names, the women would start a new journey in MK. Most of them would find out that they would spend years in exile instead of quickly receiving training and then returning to South Africa to bring down the regime.

Becoming 'uMzana womkhonto': Military training and daily life in MK

Rhythm
 spat out by the gun
 that sings liberation for the people
 in the hands of my father
 who danced in Wankie to the

rhythm
 of the birth of MK
 that has the grenades and guns
 that sing the song
 my people want to hear
 in the hands of my sister

— Baleka Kgosisile [Mbete], 'Umkhonto'

In the second appendix of 'Further Submissions and Responses by the ANC to Questions Raised by the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation' (ANC 1997), the ANC lists twelve MK camps that were established in Angola from 1976 to 1989, when all camps were closed. Some camps were closed before 1989 and some merged with others during this period. The camps were: Gabela (established in 1976 and merged with Benguela in 1977), Engineering Luanda transit camp (1977–1977), Benguela transit camp (1977–1982), Nova Catengue (1976–1979), Quibaxe (1977–1989), Funda (1976–1988), Fazenda (1978–1980), Pango (1979–1989), Viana (also known as Camp 001, 1979–1989), Hoji Ya Henda (also known as Camalundi, 1980–1981), Caculama (Malanje, 1981–1989), and Caxito (1979–1984).

In what follows, the women of MK reflect on the kind of training they received, daily life in military camps, military combat and the sexual and gender politics in MK. Like their male counterparts, women recruits had to adjust to new countries and many of them were very young. For instance, Nomsa Ngcipe spoke about the difficulty of being in Tanzania, where many of the new recruits came to learn and were infected with malaria for the first time.

Former Member of Parliament Pamela Daniels, who was part of the COSAS Nine with Brenda Badela, talks about her arrival at the Viana transit camp in war-torn Luanda, Angola:

We arrived at a place, a transit camp that was called Viana in Luanda . . . In the morning we had to go to town. The transit camp, where it was, it was like farm area where the ANC was given land by the Angolan government. We were doing everything for ourselves – cooking, you name it. We had our armoury . . . There

were buildings where our HQ was staying and comrades were sleeping in tents, and these coaches, because it was a transit camp. In the morning we were taken to town. Now, at night it was such a beautiful view – the lights, everything, people playing basketball. You could actually see them and everything. In the morning it was a different view altogether. It was like at night we landed somewhere, we woke up somewhere else. Two out of three people that you saw had one leg or no legs. The buildings, you could actually see the bullet holes. I remember thinking to myself, ‘Where the hell did I think I was going?’ . . . Now we had a new routine: wake up in the morning with morning sport; the bells will ring, go for morning sport. When we came back, we bath. After bathing we eat; after eating we clean. After that we go and we’re drilled. Now we are being prepared to go to the training camps. And it is very funny how you, you quickly adapt. The environment allows you to do that and you actually see yourself as a soldier immediately because the language, the behaviour and every other thing just points you out (Daniels, interview).

The recruits had to learn quickly that they had left a war context in South Africa for another one. Some of them shared that they were in the camps in Angola during the 1988 Battle of Cuito Cuanavale, when the SADF attacked Angolan forces fighting against the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA).

In her Amaqhawe Ethu Foundation Lecture of 26 August 2020, Phumla Williams (former director general of the Government Communication and Information System) also described the shocking conditions of camp life when she arrived at Quibaxe in 1978:

I’m not going to sit here and say I never got the shock of my life because I’ve never in my whole life, until I left the country, understood the issue of running and training and everything . . . People who know Quibaxe will tell you, it’s the most treacherous terrain. You go to the toilets, it’s a mountain. You go to the river to fetch water, it’s a mountain. You go to your residence where you live, it’s a mountain and when I got

there, it got me thinking to say, ‘Hm, is that what it is?’ But you know, the beauty of determination of what you are fighting for, it’s what sustained me because I then told myself, ‘Whew, this is painful. Going to the river is painful. Going to the gate, painful.’ But I told myself, ‘You know what, I will do it because I’ve resolved. Nobody has told me.’ My mother, for all I care, at the time thought I was going to do some degree and I’ll come back being a lawyer or what, but she didn’t understand that I was going to get an AK. I then told myself for as long as the men who are in this camp are surviving, I’m also going to survive.

Nomfundiso Kulati also stated that the conditions in Caculama were shocking

Caculamu in Angola, east of Angola. And it was not nice. The conditions were shocking. Remember I’m from home, now I’m in a military situation but it was nice though because I found what I wanted. You can remember when we left home people were dying and all what you needed was to be exposed to the might of the military weapons that we needed to use against the racist regime and go and fight (Kulati, interview).

During the colloquium “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’ in 2021, Naomi Ribbon Mosholi expressed her deep concern that the wildlife in Angola was dangerous:

There are many snakes in Angola, very dangerous, and I was terrified. You’ll find somebody – a snake is passing, and I am frozen and they’re like, ‘Oh, how can you go and fight the Boers when you are afraid of snakes?’ I said, ‘Boers are not snakes. It’s a man, it’s a woman that I’m going to be confronting, not a snake.’ But these are things that we endured and also things that we enjoyed.

The rituals of life in the training camps involved rigorous physical training and a distinct focus on political education. The MK women

emphasised the weight given to tactics in guerrilla warfare, as they understood that they were participating in an unconventional war. Lynda von den Steinen (1999) explains that across the military camps, which had about 500 trainees and 25 instructors, the everyday routines were similar. For instance, MK recruits started the day with morning exercises between 04h30 and 05h30, followed by breakfast, then 'soldiers selected to listen to the news every night on the radio, and also receive news from the Department of Information and Propaganda, and then they would compile it and share it with the camp . . . it was usually around 6 or 7 am, and they would then go to classes until about 12 or 1 pm' (Von den Steinen 1999: 102).

The recruits were taught eleven classes in political science and the 'art of warfare' (ANC 1997). The courses were: 'military topography, military engineering, military tactics, physical training, march and drill, firearms, artillery, political education, first aid, anti-air weaponry, and military combat work (ie. Underground or clandestine methods of organisation, and methods of planning insurrection)'. Brenda Badela explained the everyday routine thus:

Military training in different tactics – your physical training, how to shoot, your topography, you know, if you want to grow, and politics as well. So, we had classes; it's like you are in high school, you know. Where there would be, where there would be (what do you call high schools), not lectures, but timetable, you know, for 45 minutes, you are now going to do tactics. Tactics was more physical. The next 45 minutes is going to be politics, so teaching us about politics, you know, the countries that were close to the ANC, your Russia, your Cuba, your East Germany at the time and then topography . . . So those were some of the things, and then we had what is called engineering. Engineering is basically how to make bombs, how to use a hand grenade, you know. It was very detailed, very dangerous because we had to be very accurate . . . Then we had another one, which was called (what was it called?) – shooting, where they were teaching you how to shoot now, all sorts of weapons – AK-47 . . . (Badela, interview).

Belinda Martin emphasised the collaborative spirit between women and men in the Nova Catengue camp:

As women in uMkhonto we Sizwe, there was no leniency. We had to do everything the men did and we did it. We proudly did it and we were not discriminated against by the men. We were helped, when we couldn't carry on – they would hook you in, you know. And if you got tired, we would run together. And that's what made me so proud of the men in MK at the time. They would never leave you behind because you are a woman. They would encourage you, you know? We used to run 16 kilometres every morning, so it made it 32 kilometres . . . Every morning that was part of our training, besides the field training, weapons training; you know, we had to train in guerrilla warfare. Not conventional warfare, we were a guerrilla army. It was very rigorous; we were trained by the Cubans, the Russians, Czechoslovakians . . . I was the first female commander of the June 16 detachment (Martin, interview).

Pamela Daniels and Mpoetsi Morake explain that new MK combatants were not immediately given a gun. They were taught to guard it and be aware of its dangers.

As new recruits we were given a stick, a very thick stick; *ikhuni ikhuni elithick*, with a sling . . . *Ibibizwa umbhobho* meaning it's your gun, *umbhobho* . . . As you were going to classes, training, doing all these things, you are slinging it as your gun. I'm not supposed to lose it. You sleep with it. Everywhere you go, it's with you – whether you are eating, whether you are resting, whether you are in the toilet; wherever you go, it's always with you . . . [After] plus/minus two months, we graduated to, you even go to the shooting range, you shoot [in] all the positions . . . hip position, standing position (Daniels, interview).

Morake, who was trained in multiple camps, such as Viana, Camalundi and Caculama, shared a similar experience:

You only handled a gun after you completed your firearm training. Firstly, when you arrive you are given a branch of a tree and tie it with a type of rope, and you had to carry and treat it like an actual gun for three months. If it fell down, you fall with it. So we had that for three months. Unfortunately for us, our training was stopped several times because of threats around our camp. So, at certain times we had to leave the camp and move to makeshift camps somewhere else . . . I started handling a gun after six months in Angola (Morake, interview).

Time and again, women reiterated that MK was not military for its own sake. It was primarily a political army, whose core mandate was the liberation of black South Africans. MK recruits needed to first understand the political mission of the guerrilla army before taking on the responsibility of carrying a weapon. During the 2021 colloquium “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’, Lindiwe Mabuza reiterated that political education of MK recruits is what differentiated them from terrorists:

When they arrived in Angola, they came with wounds from home. They wanted to fight, they wanted to be like the men in the military, but what is – was – essential is that they had to, first of all, have a good political education. Political education was at the heart of the armed struggle. No political education, you are in the process of making a terrorist. The soldiers had needed to understand that they were fighting a just war. They were guerrillas in the making and not terrorists.

After classes, MK recruits took on a number of different activities. Janet Cherry (2011) points out that the process of waiting for *umtshayina* – the process of sending MK guerrillas for operations inside South Africa – did not end until some MK members formally returned to South Africa. Indeed, ‘the bitter reality was that the majority of those who went to exile and received military training were never deployed in South Africa’ (Cherry 2011: 66). During the years of waiting, the women recruits

found various activities to keep them busy in the camps. For instance, Makhosazana Xaba ended up teaching literacy in the camps:

Most of the people were younger than me . . . Some of them were not educated. Some left before they completed school. Therefore, they have no experience working as activists at home. They skipped – the terminology that you skipped – so they skipped [left the country]. They just remember marching and then they had to skip . . . There were two other people who were at least my age – my peers . . . we ended up doing literacy training – literacy education for the younger ones who really needed literacy at a very, very basic level (Xaba, interview).

Pumza Dyantyi, who was a professional nurse, worked in the camp's clinic in Benguela, before she was moved to the Quibaxe camp. Joyce Sifuba of the PAC, also spoke about education programmes for young people in the camps:

In Tanzania I trained in distance education because the Commonwealth wanted people who are going to teach or facilitate a programme distance education for the comrades who are in the camps who were not going to school . . . you remember there were lots of these young people coming out, so they hadn't finished school. When they arrived outside, some of them are too young to go to the camps. So, the Commonwealth decided it would have a bridging school, where the young comrades are going to study. So, I was one of the people who chose to go to London to train in distance education. And when I came back, I went to the schools in Bagamoyo, the programme, I mean, the programme of the PAC and the ANC in Tanzania in the camps (Sifuba, interview).

In her 2004 interview with Raymond Suttner, Faith Radebe spoke about how she used the hours after formal classes to teach some of the MK women recruits typing:

Sometimes you find that women don't have anything to do from four to, to eight, . . . then supper will be at six to half past six or six to seven – then we rest, and then at eight, it's either, we've got this – if you want to go to study, you can go and study; if you want to go and have, to go into groups and discussion groups, you can go to discussion groups. And sometimes we used to just have a day, I think twice a week, where we just have to sing revolutionary song, just to pep up, pep ourselves up, you know . . . Sometimes we'd play games, indoor games, you know. Now all that time, I then, we then suggested with the administration that, 'Why, what if women want to come and, come and learn how to do typing, I used to work'. Maybe also, I used to be more comfortable when I was dealing with women than men, you know . . . I cannot say a hundred percent, males in the camp thought that they have to type (Suttner 2004).

Belinda Martin spoke about the joy of being in the company of South Africans from different places and diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds:

We also had very wonderful times. It was a burst of culture in our camp. You know, we had cultural evenings. We had the most wonderful singers in the camp. There's one lady who I was very close to . . . She is now in the business industry, a top businesswoman, Thandi Ndlovu . . . We had our wonderful moments in Angola, much as life was tough, we also had our wonderful moments and, yes, it's where we learned about diverse cultures. Because we were people from all over South Africa, from all linguistic groups, from all cultural groups, and how our cultures fused. And it was displayed in the Amandla Cultural Group (Martin, interview).

Judy Ann Seidman expands on the cultural activities: 'Young soldiers in camps practised, transformed and created music and dance, adopting traditional dance forms to toyitoyi . . . and joining and performing in the Amandla Cultural Ensemble' (2018: 239). The 2002 documentary

Amandla! A Revolution in Four Part Harmony, directed by Lee Hirsch, provides a beautiful and compelling account of the role of music in the struggle. It includes archival footage of MK recruits singing, and some interviews with former MK recruits such as Thandi Modise and Lindiwe Zulu (Hirsch 2002).

Seidman also explains that while security reasons prevented some artists from creating visual images of daily life in the camps, cultural magazines such as *Staffrider*, the Medu Art Ensemble's newsletter, *Rixaka* (the ANC's cultural journal) and community newspapers such as *Grassroots* and the *Eye*, provide an archive of the cultural resistance to apartheid.⁶ Baleka Mbete describes her time in exile in Gaborone, Botswana, as the 'best part of exile' because of her involvement with the Medu Writers Unit. She describes the opportunity to share her writing and receive feedback as a 'golden space' that allowed her the ability to focus on her writing talent (Mbete 2012: 84).

As mentioned in the Introduction, a few MK women contributed to the anthology *Malibongwe* (Molefe 2020) with poems they had written while in MK camps. During the colloquium "*S'obashaya ngamatye*": Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa', Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele explained that *Malibongwe* was 'a vessel . . . a pot that would be accepting all of our feelings, the pain, the emotion, the loss, the love, the memories'.

According to Seidman, visual artists within MK argued fiercely about the 'representation of women combatants':

We argued, strongly, that our images should present women as soldiers, not solely as mothers and sisters and daughters of the men who did the 'real fighting'. While a good idea in principle, it was hard to generate concrete images based upon actual visual memories. We often relied on adapting images of women wearing uniforms from other liberation armies, MPLA, FRELIMO, and

6. The Medu Art Ensemble was 'formed by South Africa exiles in Gaborone, Botswana, in 1978 . . . On June 14, 1985, the South African Defence Force attacked the homes of Medu members and other activists in Gaborone, killing 12 people; Medu as an organisation ceased to exist' (<http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/medu-art-ensemble-2>).

Nicaragua. In 1984, Thami Mnyele took forward this discussion by producing a very realistic picture of Dorothy Nyembe when she was released from prison; a portrait from a photo; not in uniform or holding a gun, but with her life history as an MK combatant written beneath the image . . . As one MK soldier who had spent years in Angola said, the only time one saw a woman holding a gun and a baby was when the village was attacked, and the woman grabbed the baby and the gun and fled – hardly the image of strength and commitment that we hoped to portray. So eventually, the woman-baby-gun image was dropped from the visual lexicon (2018: 259).⁷

These accounts of experiences show that MK recruits who had imagined guerrilla training as only focusing on military training came out of the experience with various skills – educational, artistic and cultural. Many of these skills would shape the professions that they continued with upon their return to South Africa.

Cherry (2011) notes that general life in the camps was about waiting – following training, guerrillas awaited *umtshayina* (also see Mtintso 2016). For most of the combatants, including the women, the call never came. This often made life in the camps very difficult: ‘The waiting begins and you’re supposedly in an underground camp and if you don’t find something to do for yourself, I think you go crazy’ (Xaba, interview).

After the failures of the Wankie and Sipolilo campaigns (1967–1968), MK did not manage to successfully infiltrate combatants inside South Africa. However, after thousands of young people joined MK after the 1976 uprisings, there was an increase in successful operations inside South Africa, including the infiltration of combatants such as Thandi Modise (1978) and Solomon Mahlangu (1977), among others. Both were arrested and Mahlangu was executed. MK was never able to send large numbers of its combatants inside the country (Cherry 2011). Among the chief complaints of the mutineers of 1984, discussed below,

7. For a rich discussion of the visual representation of women in the ANC journals *Sechaba* and *Voice of Women*, see Miller (2009).

was a demand to send more MK members into South Africa (Ketelo et al. 1990).

Cherry (2011) and others have noted that the waiting was excruciating for guerrillas, who had hopes of returning to South Africa and bringing down the apartheid regime. Some of them eventually became disillusioned and some became alcoholics out of boredom and frustration. Some of the women were sent for further military training in countries such as Russia, East Germany and Cuba, and some were chosen to go and further their studies, after which they returned to other posts in the ANC-in-exile in Lusaka, Tanzania, Zimbabwe and elsewhere.

In our interview, Pumza Dyantyi spoke passionately about how studying medicine in Cuba profoundly influenced her views about ways to make access to healthcare part of a communal project, rather than leaving it to trained healthcare practitioners. Ruth Mantile [Mpoetsi Morake] writes about how her time in East Germany turned her into a 'young Marxist' (2019: 186). Brenda Badela also received special military training for twelve months in East Germany and Phumla Mgaba learnt to speak fluent Russian during her ten years in the Soviet Union. Nomfundiso Kulati attained a diploma in broadcasting in Zimbabwe, where she had a son with a member of the Nkomo family.

Makhosazana Xaba described being one of eight MK soldiers sent for military training in Moscow in the Soviet Union:

So, in that group there were eight of us: seven of them men and I was the only woman. So, we end up in Moscow in a block of flats, where most of the training was more political and sociological and historical. We were trained by these comrades, all of them are called (because we can't know their name) 'Victor' and the way you identify them – you differentiate them – is Victor Politics, Victor Military, Victor History. So, we lived in this camp, in this flat and one of the rooms in this flat was our lecture room, then there was the kitchen. We had one hour to go out and do something in the afternoon between 5 and 6 and in that hour most people found some ice cream and they went looking for vodka somewhere. I went to study the underground system and each time I'd go out I'd try a different route and then come back, and when we had trips as a group we went in a bus

that had curtains. That's when I saw my first ballet at St Peters, the most famous Russian ballet. So, there was a very rich cultural exposure to art and dance, to museums, but it happened within the confines of being not free, you know, having to hide. So, you know, you never got to walk in the streets. I mean, what I did was, I wasn't supposed to do what I was doing, but I never told that's how far I was going. I'd go out and be in the world (which was underground) and then come back on time and nobody asked questions. But it was risky because also you're so conspicuous. You know, in Moscow you're just odd. You stand out (Xaba, interview).

Upon her return from Moscow, Xaba asked for permission from Ronnie Kasrils to come out of the underground to work in other functions of the ANC. She was then moved to Lusaka, Zambia, where she worked for the *Voice of Women*, with Baleka Mbete and Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, among others. It was during this period that Zanele Mbeki taught her how to type. She was then sent to study journalism at the Werner-Lambertz International College of Journalism in Berlin, East Germany, in 1988. As shown in the photograph section, Xaba attended the college with journalists from countries such as Ghana, Nigeria, India, Nicaragua and Costa Rica and from organisations such as the ANC, the South West Africa People's Organisation (SWAPO) and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Overall, while women took pride in the fact that they endured and even thrived in the military training context – which gave them greater independence and confidence in themselves as soldiers trained in guerrilla warfare and as individuals – there remain debates about whether women can be said to have participated in 'direct combat'. I address women's combat roles next.

Women and combat: Totsie Memela, Dipuo Mvelase, Jackie Sedibe and Mpoetsi Morake

Comparing MK to white women's roles in the SADF, Jacklyn Cock maintains that 'most of the women in the SADF are confined to

subordinate positions which reflect the sexual division of labour in the wider society. They are involved in telecommunications and signals, logistics, finance, administration, cartography, medical and welfare work, and instructional activity' (1991: 104). During this time, women in MK were mostly deployed in intelligence, communications, transport, medical services and logistics. She points out that women in both the SADF and MK were excluded from 'direct combat'; although women in MK emphasise the fact that they received the same military training as their male counterparts, while the women in SADF received training separately from the men. However, Cock also acknowledges that the notion of 'combat' is problematic in a context of guerrilla warfare because 'the boundaries between "front" and "rear" cannot be sharply demarcated' (1991: 167). If we closely examine Totsie Memela's role in the last MK operation, Vula, it becomes possible to question and challenge a narrow understanding of women's combat roles.

Conny Braam's account of her role as chairperson of the Anti-Apartheidsbeweging Nederland (Anti-Apartheid Movement Netherlands) is important for understanding the various strategies that liberation movements mobilised beyond southern Africa and how they relied on human and material support of individuals across the globe. Braam's book *Operation Vula* chronicles the strategies that she used to approach and convince 75 Dutch nationals, including a Belgian couple, to suspend their lives in the Netherlands and move to countries such as Swaziland and Zimbabwe (2004: 173). There, they would acquire jobs and live their lives in ways that enabled them to be seen as legitimate expatriates, who, without drawing suspicion, would secretly harbour MK combatants. In addition, these individuals also hid MK weaponry and some of them smuggled weapons, money, passports and computer disks into South Africa. In order to ensure that all actors played their parts properly, without being caught by the South African security forces, Braam worked closely with Ronnie Kasrils, Mac Maharaj, Ivan Pillay and Sipiwe 'Gebuza' Nyanda, all of whom were senior members of MK. In his memoir, Kasrils notes that it became clear that MK could not operate openly in the frontline states (Angola, Botswana, Lesotho, Mozambique, Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe), but had to carry out its activities in an 'undercover manner', which relied on utilising 'a

score of safe houses [rather] than base camps' (2004: 146). The recently published *International Brigade against Apartheid: Secrets of the People's War That Liberated South Africa*, edited by Kasrils, contains first-hand details from South Africans who worked with international allies in Africa, Europe and elsewhere against apartheid and accounts by the international actors themselves (Kasrils 2021).

It was Maharaj who would explain to Braam, in her home in Amsterdam late in 1986, that 'a decision was taken some time ago that the ANC leadership should go into South Africa, underground, to unite the resistance and give political leadership' (Braam 2004: 37). Maharaj further made it clear that the implications of such a mission would entail known figures of the ANC/MK, including himself, disguising their appearance and 'not just a quick change of moustache, but a thorough disguise to change him completely, and which he would be able to use for a long time – years maybe – with no danger of being recognised'. Maharaj said that 'the South Africa security services have a certain image of an ANC guerrilla . . . A smart businessman doesn't fit their impression of a dangerous terrorist' (Braam 2004: 40). From 1986 to 1990, Braam's key duties for the MK leadership were to host various MK members, who would be disguised by professional make-up artists in order to completely alter their appearance, in her home in Amsterdam. Among those intricately disguised were Siphwe Nyanda, Catherine Dipuo Mvelase and Totsie Memela. It was Memela, dressed as a Swazi woman, who successfully managed to get Maharaj and Nyanda, who were dressed as farm labourers, into South Africa from Swaziland in 1988 (Braam 2004: 147–52).

Busisiwe Jacqueline 'Totsie' Memela was born in 1958 in Alexandra and grew up in Diepkloof, Soweto, where her family was forcibly moved in 1960 (Suttner 2003b). She is the twin sister of MK ex-combatant and former SANDF Director of Transformation Management, Major General Ntsiki Memela-Motumi. She left South Africa in 1977 for Swaziland, after she was one of the student leaders who insisted that students should not write exams that year (Suttner 2003b). Unlike other MK combatants, she did not go straight into MK, but enrolled at Emlaladini Development Centre in Manzini (called Ekosas at the time), where Lindiwe Sisulu was one of the teachers (Suttner 2003b).

She received what she calls basic military training in underground work in Swaziland, Maputo and Angola. She then underwent a year's training in Cuba:

Unlike other people that you spoke to that stayed in the camps for many, many years, I didn't have that honour or privilege. So I went to the camps, I got trained, I came back. I did work. I got trained for a (what you call) a short course . . . I remember Ayanda Dlodlo . . . actually used to call me *kiets konstabel*. A *kiets* soldier because I had always been very clear about education. So, I thought when I finish my degree, I'm going to go and train properly. I was privileged again then to go and be sent to Cuba and that's when I went and stopped being a *kiets* constable or a *kiets* soldier [laughs]. So, I went to Cuba, spent a year there doing a lot of different types of training and then I came back and continued to work underground (Memela, interview).

In our interview at her Eduloan offices in Johannesburg, where she was a chief executive officer at the time, Memela talked about her role in Operation Vula: 'The ANC took a view that they need to infiltrate the leadership [into South Africa] because by just infiltrating troops, people didn't have guidance; they didn't have support that, I mean, I brought Mac Maharaj in the country'. It is the account that she gave to Braam in 1990 in Zimbabwe that paints a raw picture:

Ivan [Pillay] told me that the job was to infiltrate two important people into South Africa. We had to maintain absolute secrecy, and to make the preparations very carefully indeed. We reconnoitered the border area for weeks. I checked out all the places we'd used before to climb over the fence and searched out new ones. My first choice was for places where the local people cross over now and then, visiting family or going to a clinic. I've never prepared so intensively for an infiltration before . . . We knew that the soldiers would leave their tents at the end of the month to go to town and cash their pay cheques. We had to find out the exact day it would happen, and somehow work out which

bit of the border would temporarily be unguarded. I dressed as a Swazi woman and hung around near the houses and the shebeen, gossiping here and there, and trying to keep a good view of the tents and the soldiers. On the last day of July I saw they were gone. I'd warned Ivan the day before that it could be any moment now, and he was waiting in a house close to the border, where I'd been for days. We drove fast, back to town where Mac was staying at Andre's place. They fetched Gebuza, and then they decided that the next day was it . . . The bit that crosses no-man's land is the most dangerous, because you can so easily be seen from the South African side. But there wasn't a soul in sight and I quickly climbed over the border fence. It's about three metres high, but I've done it so often now, it only takes me a moment. On the other side I quickly walked to the clumps of trees there which give a good view of the road which runs parallel to the border. Andre had already crossed the border near Amsterdam sometime before, with his car and Dutch passport, and he was checking the stretch of road they'd have to use to get deeper into South Africa. We had to know if there were checkpoints set up . . . I saw Mac and Gebuza appear from the woods in their overalls . . . Mac pulled his cap further down over his eyes, and Gebuza came up to me with a huge grin on his face. He said: 'Good morning South Africa!' (in Braam 2004: 147–50)

Suttner argues that 'it is important that we do not fetishise a narrow conception of combat as meaning direct physical fighting' (Suttner 2007: 243). He uses Memela's reconnaissance work to clarify that 'everything that is part of achieving a military goal is part of a military action' (Suttner 2003b). In 'Women in the ANC-Led Underground', Suttner articulates:

Totsie Memela's work in reconnaissance, which may be the type of activity described as less 'glorious', appears to have been just as dangerous as the actual infiltration of the *Vula* group for which she prepared, having to ensure that every point at which they entered, every place where they would stay, was safe. In so doing,

she tested the danger or otherwise of the various elements of the enterprise (2007: 244).

In another account of getting ANC operatives into South Africa, Memela tells Braam how she managed to get two South Africans into the country with the help of an elderly South African man who had lived for a long time in Swaziland, Baba Nsibande in February 1990.⁸ It took a three-and-a-half-hour journey from Swaziland to cross the South African border at night, while Memela was pregnant at the time! Memela's decisive role in Operation Vula shows the direct ways in which women participated in combat. It was the combination of her military training and a strategic use of her femininity, dressing as an 'ordinary' Swazi woman, that made her reconnaissance work possible.

Dipuo Catherine Mvelase (*nom de guerre* Minah Motau), one of the central combatants of Operation Vula, was part of the 'Vula Eight', with Sphiwe Nyanda, Susanna Tshabalala, Dipak Patel and Pravin Jamnadas Gordhan, among others. They were arrested in July 1990. She was accused number three on the charge of 'terrorism in contravention of Section 54 (1) of the Internal Security Act No 74 of 1982' (O'Malley n.d.). As noted earlier, Mvelase had travelled to the Netherlands to be disguised by Braam.

Mvelase was born on 5 July 1965 in Alexandra, Johannesburg (O'Malley 2003). She became involved in student politics in high school in 1980. Aged seventeen, she arrived in Angola through Botswana in 1983, where she trained and served in various capacities in MK – as 'an instructor, a political instructor . . . Platoon Commissar . . . [and] auxiliary instructor' (O'Malley 2003) until 1987. Mvelase was 'the deputy leader of the MK delegation to the ANC conference in Kabwe' in 1985 that adopted the concept of People's War (O'Malley 2003; also see Nqakula 2017). She entered South Africa under the pretence that she was an engaged Swazi woman coming to South Africa to buy clothes in Durban for her wedding.

8. In his chapter in *International Brigade against Apartheid: Secrets of the People's War That Liberated South Africa*, Ivan Pillay provides a moving account of Baba Nsibande's central role in Swaziland (Pillay 2021).

Mvelase explains that her main role in Operation Vula was training people in the townships (such as KwaMashu in KwaZulu-Natal) during the night or in the early hours of the morning 'in terms of the use of weapons'. She worked with 'the units that were fighting back in the K section which was just opposite Lindelani which was the main place where Inkatha was located' (O'Malley 2003). She told Pdraig O'Malley that she was involved in 'only in one or two incidents' of physical fighting between the ANC and Inkatha in that area (O'Malley 2003). When she was eventually arrested with Nyanda, she said the police knew that she was a MK combatant (O'Malley 2003).

In our interview, Silumko 'Soks' Sokupa explained the important role that retired Major General Jackie Sedibe (MK's head of communications) played in developing the encrypted communication that was used by the combatants who participated in Operation Vula across countries:

Operation Vula, these guys they were with Siphwe Nyanda, Mac Maharaj and others, they had a way of communicating . . . but this is the lady, this is the person that was behind all that . . . it's secret communications, you've got to, in less than three minutes, you've got to be able to install this thing and do your communications, receive the message from the other side and take it and go decrypt it somewhere. You've got to move from that spot because it can be detected by anybody . . . you had to be off the place as quickly as possible . . . That's the nature of the communication that this lady was in charge of (Sokupa, interview).

Sokupa shared that when the ANC announced that it would immediately suspend all armed activities in August 1990, he was head of the ANC's underground machinery in Swaziland at the time and had to use these secret communication channels to give members 'an order to cease all operations' (Sokupa, interview).

Mpoetsi Morake described a visit to the Viana camp by MK Army Commander, Joe Modise, in 1983. He told them that UNITA was approaching the Angolan eastern front and that the ANC had been

requested by the Angolan government to assist the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) and the People's Armed Forces for the Liberation of Angola (FAPLA). Morake travelled with between 40 and 50 MK combatants to Malanje for the UNITA confrontation (Morake, interview; also see Mantile 2019: 216–17). She describes the direct confrontation between MK and UNITA combatants that happened on their way to the MK camp in Cacuso:

As we were driving towards Cacuso, we saw a truck in front of us, but before the commander could decide on what to do next, we were showered with bullets from the truck. We were luckily armed to the teeth, with RPG-7's, AK's, LMG's and other artillery, and retaliated by firing back. For a moment, I felt as if I was in Beirut: there were gunshots everywhere. I took cover because I realised that my gun jammed, and I could not take a chance to expose my position to the enemy. The shooting continued for more than forty minutes, and I was really scared for my life and those of my comrades. After a while, the shooting stopped, and I raised my head and found that all the comrades were still alive, and I could see the excitement of victory on their faces . . . We jumped out of the truck to investigate the enemy's truck, where we discovered sixteen dead bodies and two others nearby with bullet wounds in their backs, which showed that they were running. It meant we found twenty-one dead bodies and none from our side (Mantile 2019: 224–5).

Morake spoke about this MK operation with pride. To her, their triumph against UNITA meant that they were ready for their ultimate confrontation with the SADF. The discussion below about the 1984 mutiny in MK camps speaks to the fact that the deployment of MK combatants to fight UNITA was resented by some in MK who felt that they ought to have been sent for battle inside South Africa instead.

Shireen Hassim also notes that women in MK challenged MK leadership to send more women for underground activities by arguing that 'it has been proven that the chances of survival in the underground for women are greater than for men' (2014: 62). Cock provides a

compelling example of this by pointing to how Thandi Modise was called the 'knitting needles guerrilla' because when she was operating underground 'reconnoitering potential military targets' in Transvaal urban areas 'she tried to look as ordinary as possible' (1991: 151). Thula Simpson describes a day in mid-March 1978 when Thandi Modise entered a branch of OK Bazaars in Eloff Street in Johannesburg, 'wearing a maternity dress and carrying a sling bag over her shoulder. In the bag are dozens of boxes, which look like they contain matches, but which in fact consist of igniters attached to ready-made timers' (2016: 234). She would place the matches in the clothes, leave the store and wait across the road for the fire to ignite.

Shirley Gunn was commander of the Ashley Kriel Detachment, which 'conducted over thirty operations across the Cape between late 1987' and 11 February 1990 (Gunn and Haricharan, 2019: xiii). Gunn, who had been trained in Angola and Cuba, trained most of the internally based members of the detachment.

There are many more stories yet to be told about women's foundational roles in the various combat operations of MK. There are also cases of MK women such as Nokuthula Simelane, who was captured by apartheid security forces while on an MK mission in Johannesburg in September 1983. Simelane, whose MK name was Sbongile, was interrogated, tortured and killed at the age of 23 (Miller 2017; Lissoni 2021). Phila Ndwandwe (MK name Zandi/Zandile) was also operating from Swaziland when she was abducted by the Security Branch in Manzini in October 1988. She was stripped naked, tortured and killed (Dlamini 2014; Lissoni 2021). Like Simelane, she was 23 when she was brutally murdered.

From the sabotage campaigns of the 1960s to the Wankie and Sipolilo operations and those of the 1970s and 1980s, it is hard to imagine that any of these operations would have been possible without the concrete participation of women, across countries, who risked their lives to fight against apartheid. It is clear that when women participated in military operations, they made use of their guerrilla training and manipulated societal assumptions about women's assumed non-combatant status. Their accounts of their experiences reflect a dynamic intersection of military training and creative performances of femininity.

‘Our feminism was . . . built in this situation’: Leadership, reproductive access and sexual violence

When MK was formed in 1961, there was no representation of women in the MK High Command. Tom Lodge notes that Nelson Mandela’s testimony during the Rivonia trial ‘suggested that the founding of this organisation [MK] was the work of ANC men alone’ (1983: 233). While women participated in MK inside and outside South Africa, they have been under-represented in positions of leadership and authority in MK (Cock 1991). James Ngcucu argues that ‘the ANC was patriarchal in its outlook and approach’ (2009: 233). This under-representation of women was also more broadly visible in ANC leadership structures: ‘Until 1991 there were only three women on the National Executive Committee and only one woman in a formally acknowledged leadership position within MK – the head of communications, Jacqueline Molefe [Jackie Sedibe], appointed in 1983’ (Cock 1991: 162).

The majority of the women I interviewed said that they were treated ‘equally’ and sometimes even better than men in MK camps. Pamela Daniels stated that responsibilities around the camps were shared according to platoons:

We’ll do that from morning until lunch and one platoon will be on duty. Whilst we’re in the class, one platoon will be going to fetch firewood, guarding the camp, and it will be responsible for taking food in the main base in the kitchen and bringing it to bases. That’s one platoon, so we rotate. After lunch, we all go to physical work in the camp. Keeping the surroundings, digging trenches, making sure that the base is camouflaged. So, that even if by air they don’t see that there are people staying here . . . A platoon will go on duty just in the afternoon until morning. Now people were cooking in the camps. They were called the kitchen staff. It was only female, but every other thing we were doing it equally. Whether fetching firewood, whether it’s going on duty – everything (Daniels, interview).

In her Amaqhawe Ethu Foundation Lecture (26 August 2020), Phumla Williams shared that some male MK members had problems with accepting women as leaders:

I was a commissar of some of the raw soldiers . . . going to be dealing with only men in the camp and they found themselves having somebody who happens to be a woman who's going to be their leader because, basically, I was the leader of the section. And I have seen how some of them were so annoyed and I think I've got this story that I keep telling people. There was a guy who was from QwaQwa, who was in that section. Firstly, he was speaking Sotho, real, deep Sotho. I didn't understand Sotho that much. I was meant to convene them in the evenings for political discussion. I needed to lead the discussions and moderate some of the discussion and I remember one evening. You know, he kept quiet for quite a few of the sessions . . . raise[d] a hand and I then pointed him. He says that, 'You know, if I knew that the ANC was actually going to get me to be led by women, I wouldn't have joined that African National Congress.' And it was so amazing because he was rude and he was angry. So, I remember saying to him, 'So Comrade, what are you suggesting we must do?' And then he says, 'I hate the fact that you are the one who's talking to me. You are a woman and you are not supposed to talk to me.' So, the amazing thing for me in the camps is that all of us were battling with this patriarchy. There were other male comrades who ended up coming to my rescue. Some of the male comrades, they were saying, 'Hey, Baba, here you don't have a choice. She's our commissar. We have to respect. We have to respect her. She's been appointed.' And also the beauty of the camp life and a military life, it's command and control and there's no – you don't have luxury of crying . . .

Jackie Sedibe told Cock that 'in MK I feel I'm respected, but you have to prove yourself over and over again' (1991: 163).

Nomfundiso Kulati insisted that although there were far fewer women than men in the camps, they were respected:

We were not too many and what I've observed is it's unfortunate that throughout the years, women were always very few. They were very few, but the women were highly respected, they

were given their role in terms of leadership. They would be commanders, they would be commissars. They were valued in many respects (Kulati, interview).

During the colloquium “‘*S’obashaya ngamatye*’: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’ in 2021, Makhosazana Xaba indicated that women who joined MK in the 1980s found the conditions better than those who joined in the 1970s. At the same colloquium, Naomi Ribbon Mosholi, who joined MK in 1976, explained that women experienced particular difficulties as women:

The most difficult thing, particularly in the ’70s, in the camps was getting the necessary materials, you know, pads, even change of panties, was a struggle. At some point, somebody was sent to Botswana to go and buy us underwear. I don’t know, for some reason this man was embarrassed to say he wants also panties. We were all wearing jockeys. We used to just sew them in front because there was nothing else, you know, and imagine now when you have to struggle. First, the soap is not adequate when you have to wash that stain. You take longer. It was really serious. Those who came after us, maybe in the middle ’80s, the situation was somewhat better because we had gone out in the world and we, as part of *umphando* [a search], we will also get pads and tampons and stuff like that, but it wasn’t easy. It was really not easy. Deodorants, you are always very self-conscious. ‘My god, there’s no deodorant. How smelly am I?’ You know, after a long march or something like that because – even water. Water was also scarce sometimes, where you find that in a small bowl, three or four of you have to make the holy cross, you know, just to be a little fresh. Difficult . . . Our feminism was also kind of built in this situation . . . We used anything we could find. Anything. And we learned, also, when we could get sanitary towels, that, you know, you don’t just throw it in the garbage. We used to wash them clean and throw – then throw them, even a tampon. Apart from the fact that some of the tampons, we used to hollow

in order to hide bullets that were coming into the country. You know, those that we used ended up being washed before they are thrown away.

The increasing recruitment of women into MK meant that the organisation needed to provide sanitary towels to women recruits. As Mosholi explains, MK was ill-prepared to provide this material support to women in the 1970s. The ANC's Department of Health had a regional health team in Angola (as well as in East Africa, United Kingdom, Zambia and Zimbabwe), which provided 'basic curative services, mental health services, preventative and health services, and maternal and child health services' (Tsampiras 2012: 649). By the 1980s, the ANC and MK had to address the increase in pregnancies and HIV and AIDS infections. Rachel Sandwell (2015) explains that pregnancy emerges distinctly as an issue requiring organisational attention after 1976. In 1978 alone, 'an estimated total of 35 infants [were] born to ANC mothers' (2015: 69). Carla Tsampiras quotes a 1987 health report in which Dr Bob Mayekiso, who was the secretary of the health department in Angola, writes about the need to prevent 'unplanned pregnancies in the army' and an 'urgent need for a contraceptive programme in the region' (Tsampiras 2012: 653). Tsampiras shows that the 'the focus on contraceptives to prevent pregnancies and on assisting womyn [*sic*] who are pregnant is the responsibility of the womyn concerned and organizationally directly linked to the Women's Secretariat' (2012: 653). Therefore, while many women in MK became pregnant in the context of relationships with MK men, they shouldered the responsibility to prevent pregnancy. Within the ANC more broadly, it was women in the Women's Secretariat who carried the responsibility of ensuring that MK women recruits accessed contraceptives.

When women did become pregnant in MK, they were removed from camps in Angola to Tanzania to stay at the Charlotte Maxeke Hostels for Expectant and Young Mothers (the Charlottes) in Mazimbu. Ngculu also observes that the removal of pregnant women from camps 'was generally viewed as a form of punishment for getting pregnant' (2009: 152). MK women protested that during pregnancies 'women were left with the responsibility to look after children, while male cadres either got on with their revolutionary work free of obligations, or became involved

with new partners and had other children' (Hassim 2014: 45; Ngculu 2009). In cases of women who chose to abort their pregnancies, Ngculu notes that these women were 'seen to have committed a punishable offence' (2009: 152). Tsampiras states that although the ANC was broadly concerned with managing 'unplanned' pregnancies and the spread of HIV and AIDS in exile, 'while the physical results of womyn's [*sic*] sexual practices in terms of pregnancy often required the ANC to address the consequences of those sexual practices directly, there is little evidence to suggest that men's sexual practices were similarly addressed' (2012: 656). Tsampiras (2012) and Sandwell (2015) show that women in these heterosexual relationships assumed primary care for children as biological mothers or mother substitutes in places such as the Charlottes. Before Mpoetsi Morake (Mantile 2019) realised that she was pregnant, she was due to be deployed to Lesotho. Instead of *umtshayina*, she was moved from Angola to the Charlottes, where she gave birth to her son.

The other issue that MK women recruits dealt with was sexual harassment and sexual violence. During the colloquium "*S'obashaya ngamatye*": Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa' in 2021, Mosholi shared that when even younger women joined MK after the state of emergencies of 1985 and 1986, she had to protect them from pervasive sexual harassment:

There was a time, I think it was the state of emergency in South Africa in the '80s, where now very, very, very, very young girls were coming out, some even at the age of twelve, and you find a whole scramble towards these young kids. At some point I had to cock my gun, say, 'You leave this child alone', you know. That's not the best way to deal with this thing but we learned to deal with it as gently and also as firmly as we could.

There have been various efforts to document the different risks that men and women experienced due to their gender, such as the sexual violence, often at the hands of male superiors in the military camps, as well as the sexual violence that women faced at the hands of the South African police (Cock 1991; Suttner 2008; Van der Merwe and Lamb 2009). Article 3 of the general regulations in the MK Code of Conduct

states: 'All combatants shall act in such a manner that the people will put their trust in the army, recognise it as their protector, and accept the liberation movement as their legitimate and authentic representative' (ANC 1996). It then outlines acts or omissions that will be seen as an offence, including:

Assaults, rape, disorderly conduct, the use of insulting and/or obscene language, bullying and intimidation, whether against a comrade or member of the public . . . shameful conduct likely to disgrace the ANC, army or bring them into disrepute, or provoke indignation and contempt against them, such as violating the right and dignity of the opposite sex, whether in operational or base areas (ANC 1996).

This means that the ANC and MK leadership were aware of the likelihood of sexual harassment and violence within the camps and beyond. The experience of Mpoetsi Morake (Ruth Mantile), discussed below, shows that punishment for rape included the perpetrator being sent to a rehabilitation centre, such as the Morris Seabelo Rehabilitation Centre (known as Camp 32 or Quatro). Ruth Mompoti explains that as more women joined MK, she and other women leaders who were based mainly in Zambia and Tanzania, committed to frequently visiting the camps in Angola to speak to women combatants and to address sexual harassment in the camps:

The men all thought they had to be related to these women. This was the greatest problem right through, even later on when we were no longer in Kongwa; when we were in Angola. You had to be there to talk to the women; they also had to know that they could talk to us. We definitely had problems. Men were the problem. Not that all our men were really problematic. But this was life and everybody wanted a girlfriend and there were only so many women (Mompoti 2008: 316).

One MK woman that I interviewed shared that it was challenging to be one of few women in a camp with around 500 men 'who had needs'.

Another noted that life in the camps was not easy when it came to relationships between older and younger combatants, especially women combatants:

When I arrived in Viana, some guys, the soldiers, the male comrades, were from the bush and it had been a long time since they saw women [laughs]. They will make moves, you know, towards new arrivals. That environment, when you arrive, you had fears when you meet the older people who have been there for a long time, and who have not been with women in a long time. So you would find that you develop relationships that are not genuine, relationships that are based on what you are going to benefit and some who were lazy to train – who wanted things to move easily – would accept situations whereby they would be involved in a relationship not because of love, but because they wanted the relationship to be easy, because some of our combatants, the males, were in high ranks. Some of them would abuse their positions and take advantage of the female combatants that just arrived, because ‘if you don’t do what I’m telling you, I will make you sweat’ that kind of talk . . . ‘I’ll make you sweat’, so, you find yourself in this condition and think, ‘Let me *jol* [get into a relationship] with this commander’ because the lifestyle will be easy (Ngcipe, interview).

As a result of older combatants taking advantage of younger recruits, Chris Hani introduced Rule 25, that ‘no officer will have a relationship with a new recruit because it is an unfair relationship’ (Suttner 1993). Despite this rule, relationships continued between combatants in the camps. Lindiwe Zulu admitted that her relationship with her husband in Angola was in defiance of Rule 25:

I met my husband in the camps in Angola. That was at the worst of times. Him and all the senior people at the camps at the time were not allowed to start relationships with the new recruits. We broke that because I was a new recruit and he was already an officer at the time in the camps, having been there for a very long time (ENCA 2019).

In our interview and in her memoir, Mpoetsi Morake (Ruth Mantile) describes four times that she was raped. She was first raped at home in Bloemfontein when she was in Standard Five (Grade Seven) by a stranger, while returning home from visiting a friend. The second rape happened in June 1980, as she was making final preparations to leave Bloemfontein for Lesotho. She was collecting money from a comrade's home. She was raped by someone who introduced themselves as the brother of the comrade from who she was to collect the funds.

The third rape happened on her first night in exile in Maseru, Lesotho, in September 1980. She was raped by a senior ANC member who was tasked with writing down her biography as a new recruit of the ANC. Upon realising that she was exhausted from the long journey from Bloemfontein to Maseru, he advised her to rest. As she says, in the company of a 'senior comrade', she 'felt safe' (Mantile 2019: 110). He woke her from her sleep and raped her. She did not report him to the ANC leadership.

The fourth time was at the Viana camp in Angola:

I was on duty because after day work, as a trained person you would be on duty at night, so between 20h00 and 22h00, I was on duty and I was sleeping on the post, but I was sleeping standing up. So, this comrade found me and said I was sleeping and I apologised and he left. So, if you did 20h00 to 22h00 at night, you would also do 02h00 to 04h00 in the morning. So, between 02h00 and 04h00, I was on duty, he came. He was a big guy; my son is big like him. So, he arrived at 02h00 in the morning, first making small talk and then he took out his gun, and I just looked at him . . . I didn't think. He said either I sleep with him or he was going to shoot me, there was struggle for some time but after having been raped four times, there's point where I stopped fighting. Because he was also big, so he overpowered and raped me. So, after he raped me, he said I must go, and he'll guard the post. So, you're in Angola in a security situation so you're wondering if I tell, won't they say '*ngiwu mdlwembe ngifun' ukudestroya abo comrade*' [a traitor that wants to destroy comrades]. So, that was on mind. Unfortunately, I

got pregnant . . . As usual, I didn't tell anyone. Until I told one of my comrades and this guy was arrested, but after I left and he was sent to Quatro, fortunately (Morake interview; see also Mantile 2019: 207).

Mantile (2019) explains that it was Mzwandile Piliso (known as Comrade Mzwai), the ANC's head of the Department of Security and Intelligence, who authorised the arrest of her rapist. Many women were raped in MK camps by men senior to them in the ANC and MK. Women who had freshly arrived to join the ANC and MK feared being labelled as 'traitors' if they reported their abuse. It is not surprising then that many MK men and women speak casually of the abuse and rape of new recruits. The rapists understood that new, young entrants would not have the social support to report senior members. Mantile's case shows, however, that perpetrators were at times arrested for committing sexual violence.

Goldblatt and Meintjes (1996) point out that women rarely speak about their personal experiences of sexual harassment and violence. My impression during my interviews with MK women is that women combatants do not deny the reality of sexual violence against women in MK. As I point out in the Introduction, what they resist is the portrayal of women ex-combatants as 'sexual slaves', which undermines the various roles and influences of women's presence in MK and ANC institutional culture. Women's accounts show that MK became less patriarchal over time because of women's actions against patriarchal behaviour. Over time, MK had to respond to women's reproductive healthcare needs, sexual harassment and violence. This is what Mosholi meant at the colloquium "*S'obashaya ngamatye*": Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa' when she said: 'Our feminism was built in this situation.' As Judy Seidman and Thenjiwe Mtintso (2017) argue, MK became less patriarchal because of women's agency, commitment and their 'belief and actions as liberation fighters'. Chapter 4 shows that the leadership roles of women ex-combatants who joined the SANDF, and whose vision of gender transformation in the SANDF was shaped by their experiences in MK, has led to a post-apartheid defence force that is an example of successful gender diversity and inclusion.

Mpoetsi Morake (Ruth Mantile) was one of three women who mentioned Morris Seabelo Rehabilitation Centre (known as Camp 32 or Quatro) in Angola, where ANC and MK members suspected of being ‘enemy agents’ were imprisoned, brutally tortured and some killed by members of the ANC’s security department called Mbokodo (Ketelo et al. 1990; Ellis and Sechaba 1992; Trewhela 2009; Ellis 2012; Callinicos 2015). Below, I discuss how a few of the women spoke about Quatro.

Mkatashingo: Torture and mutiny

One of the contestations about the legitimacy of the TRC process was the extent to which crimes against humanity committed by national liberation movements ought to be publicly recognised or punished, or ways to seek reconciliation over those crimes.

Stephen Ellis and Tsepo Sechaba’s book *Comrades against Apartheid: The ANC and the South African Communist Party in Exile* details the weakness of MK and the alarming ease with which MK could be infiltrated by apartheid security agents (1992). Luli Callinicos shows how the infiltration of agents into the ANC and MK became a ‘counter-insurgency’ method of the SADF, which involved ‘recruiting agents positioned in strategic places such as the media and in exile structures’ (2015: 454). A notable case of successful infiltration of MK is the poisoning of 500 MK combatants in the Nova Catengue camp. Belinda Martin was among those poisoned there in September 1977:

Oh yes, we were infiltrated and then poisoned . . . only to come and find that it was done, the food poisoning was done by one of our cadres . . . Because a search was done. Doctors from Luanda had to be flown in by helicopter because now even the Cuban doctors were – we were all crawling, vomiting and diarrhoea at the same time, you know? And it would have been a quick death if the Cuban doctors didn’t fly in and rescue the situation in time. Because nobody could help anybody, everybody was crawling, vomiting and . . . the Cubans arrived from Luanda just in time and gave us the necessary treatment and then the search began . . . They found some blue powder in his belongings. We called it ‘blue death’ . . . It was very, very disappointing. [He]

had to be taken away. He had to – he went to an Angolan prison, and from there – well, I can't say what happened to him. But he had to pay the price anyway (Martin, interview).

Following this poisoning, which became known as 'Black September', the ANC aimed to strengthen its security department, Mbokodo, headed by Mzwai Piliso (Callicos 2015; Ellis 1990).

The 1990 publication of the article 'A Miscarriage of Democracy: The ANC Security Department in the 1984 Mutiny in uMkhonto we Sizwe' by survivors of the 1984 mutiny in MK camps provides the context for the mutiny, the demands of the MK combatants and the responses by the ANC and MK leadership to their demands (Ketelo et al. 1990). Among the key reasons that led to the 1984 mutiny, known as Mkatashingo, was the arrest, torture, rape and killing of MK members who were suspected of being spies for the apartheid regime. Ketelo et al. call this the 'internal-enemy-danger-psychosis', where everything became viewed as a 'security risk or enemy machination' (1990: 38–9). Suspected MK combatants were detained in Quatro. According to Ketelo et al. (1990), the leaders that had access to Quatro were Mzwai Piliso, Joe Modise and Andrew Masondo. They emphasise that the torture and execution of suspected MK combatants 'were carried out in the camps themselves, and not in secrecy in Quatro, where only a few would know' (Ketelo et al. 1990: 41).

Paul Trehwela's *Inside Quatro: Uncovering the Exile History of the ANC and SWAPO* (2009) provides harrowing personal testimonies of former ANC/MK members who were accused of working undercover for the apartheid security branch, and were arrested and tortured in Quatro. Among the most documented is the 1984 mutiny of MK members who made several demands for changes in MK including 'that they should be sent into action in South Africa; that the security department should be suspended; that the Quatro (Camp 32) prison camp should be investigated; and that Tambo, who was in the country should address them' (Macmillan 2014: 86). When the ANC appointed the Stuart Commission to look into the demands of the MK combatants, their findings 'described a "a nearly total collapse of the political, military and

moral organisation” (Macmillan 2014: 87). A second mutiny broke out in the Pango camp in May 1984 that led to the deaths of MK members, killed by their own comrades. Those who were believed to have been responsible for the deaths were arrested and executed.

One of the MK combatants who survived the 1984 mutiny was Luvo Mbengo (Ketelo et al. 1990; Trewhela 2009; Mbengo 2013). I interviewed Luvo Mbengo's mother in August 2013 in Gqeberha. She was one of eleven women from Gqeberha who travelled to Zambia and Tanzania in 1987 and 1988 to see their children. Her son, who was in Tanzania at the time, was taken to meet her in Zambia. It was when walking outside after the interview that she briefly lamented that we need to reflect honestly about the hardships of exile life. She said that while travelling to see their children, they saw things that their children went through and that are not easy to talk about. When I heard her story, I had not yet read the academic and newspaper accounts that detail the experiences her son went through.

Luvo Mbengo (2013) mentions in passing, that an MK member ‘appeared in front of a military tribunal and was sentenced to death by firing squad. But his life was saved by Gertrude Shope, the head of the ANC Women's Section.’ Hugh Macmillan also quotes Shope as saying, ‘I rushed back to Lusaka and said to the leadership: Stop the executions . . . do anything, sentence them, but don't execute them’ (2014: 89).

It is important to note here that I did not explicitly ask my interviewees about the treatment of suspects in Quatro camp and only three of them brought it up. Future research may better establish the roles and positions that MK women and other women leaders, such as Ruth Mompati, who was said to have frequently visited the camps, played in the punishing, torture and killing of MK members suspected of betraying the movement.

Central to the discussion about human rights violations in the ANC in exile is a view that it gave rise to a secretive, authoritarian culture that if unaddressed, could be reproduced in the way in which the ANC governs in democratic South Africa (Ellis and Sechaba 1992; Trewhela 2009; Ellis 2012). Ellis concluded an article about Mbokodo, written in 1990, with a cryptic prediction that may have come to pass: ‘One of

the more disturbing possibilities of a future South African government is that it will employ in its security department veterans both of the old South African Police Security Branch and of *Mbokodo*, both of them having a shabby tradition of brutality and contempt for legality' (Ellis 1990: 297).

The report of the High-Level Review Panel on the State Security Agency (Mufamadi et al. 2018) found evidence of increased politicisation of civilian intelligence and an 'almost complete disregard for policy and prescript – in short, serious breaches of the Constitution, policy, law, regulations and directives' (Mufamadi et al. 2018: 24). In August 2021, President Cyril Ramaphosa removed the Minister of State Security, Ayanda Dlodlo, and placed the State Security Agency under the presidency. This move has been taken as evidence of the continuing crisis in the State Security Agency, whose abuse, corruption and politicisation is well documented in Jacques Pauw's *The President's Keepers: Those Keeping Zuma in Power and out of Prison* (2017).

Trewhela has also argued that ANC leadership is shaped by 'two different styles of leadership within the ANC, the one – of the "external" leaders – deriving from three decades of closed, autarchic, command society in the camps . . . the other, of "internal" leaders, from the more open and pluralistic culture developed in the trade union and civic associations within the country during the 1970s and 1980s' (2009: 69). Macmillan's contribution to this debate has been to argue that 'the ANC did not have a single culture of exile. This differed markedly from place to place, and from time to time. It was hugely different in, for example, the camps in Angola and the urban environment of Lusaka' (2013: 281). He underscores the dangers of a homogeneous view of 'exile culture' and points out that 'the case of "inziles" were [also] not homogeneous, and that the two groups overlapped' (2013: 281). What is implicit in the claims of Ellis (2012) and Trewhela (2009) about the dominance of a secretive, military culture, is its masculine nature, which is evident in the tensions between the key figures in charge of different organs of the ANC, MK and the SACP – all men – from Chris Hani to Joe Slovo, Joe Modise to Oliver Tambo. We still need to know more about the roles of individual women leaders and rank-and-file women combatants in these specific periods of the armed struggle.

Conclusion

Women's experiences of MK institutional culture were shaped by the time in which they participated. Although women were under-represented in MK leadership throughout the exile period, the increase in their numbers after the 1976 Soweto uprisings and the experience of MK women recruits from the student and Black Consciousness Movement, for example, was transformative, as the new recruits brought gender equality to the fore as an issue in MK. As a result of their actions, more women were appointed as commanders and women played a central role in MK operations such as Vula. It was because of women's actions that MK became more responsive to women's reproductive needs and they were also responsible for the introduction of rules that explicitly disallowed male leaders from sexually abusing young recruits.

There was a dynamic intersection between women's guerrilla status and their femininity. While they did not want to be called 'she/woman-soldiers' or 'she-comrades', women's combat deployment as 'knitting needles guerrillas' like Thandi Modise, or caricatures of Swazi women (Memela and Mvelase) relied on their guerrilla training and a manipulation of femininity. As 'uMzana woMkhonto' (Dlodlo 2020), they disguised their guerrilla training by playing upon women's assumed civilian vulnerability to blur the lines between combatant and civilian, battlefield and home front. Their actions blurred the assumed masculine-derived distinctions between war and peace.

2

Combative Mothers, Bantu Authority and Ungovernability

By the time I was born, on 9 April 1980, my mother knew how to strip and assemble an AK-47 in exactly thirty-eight seconds.

— Zoleka Mandela, *When Hope Whispers: A True Story*

I remember an early morning before I went into exile, very early morning. My son was on the breast, but as a comrade arrived, it was 4.00, after 4 o'clock in the morning because we had to go somewhere – that was the reality of underground work. I had to pull my son from my breast. I'll never forget the feeling of him holding onto my breast, holding onto my nipple, and me pulling him out of the breast, pulling him away from my nipple, and knowing that actually, I was unlikely ever to bring him back to that breast and that was that.

— Baleka Mbete¹

This chapter presents accounts of experiences of combative mothers and the young women who participated in the paramilitary structures inside South Africa. It first examines the experiences of women in the Pan Africanist Congress's (PAC's) armed wing, Poqo, who resisted the imposition of Bantu authorities in the 1960s in Mqanduli in the former Transkei, the current Eastern Cape Province. Their experiences provide an important account of the role of women in Poqo and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), which remain marginalised in public culture and in academic literature. The chapter then focuses on the role

1. During the colloquium '“*S'obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa' held on 9–10 August 2021. See also Mbete (2012: 73).

of women as mothers and girl children of school-going age, known as the ‘young lions’, who participated as combatants in the township uprisings of the 1980s that ultimately made apartheid unsustainable. Their experiences illuminate the ways in which girls and ‘women used domesticity, a space over which women usually have more control than other spheres, to map the interpolations of violence in their lives’ (Ross 2003: 42). As Hugh Macmillan argues, ‘when Oliver Tambo, in his ANC anniversary speech in January 1985, called upon the people of South Africa to make the country “ungovernable”, he was responding to a crisis that had already begun’ (2014: 98).

Founders of uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK), Poqo and later APLA believed that they could not defeat the National Party government without the support and participation of black people. It is therefore important that the experiences of thousands of women and girls who championed the armed struggle must be understood and theorised.

The ‘general who never gave the order to fire’: Combative motherhood

‘Khawuleza’ is a South African song. It comes from the townships, locations, reservations, whichever, near the cities of South Africa, where all the black South Africans live. The children shout from the streets as they see police cars coming to raid their homes for one thing or another. They say, ‘Khawuleza, Mama!’ which simply means ‘Hurry up, Mama! Please, please don’t let them catch you!’

— Miriam Makeba, ‘Khawuleza’

There are six in my family who couldn’t even bury me if I should die today. Aside from my husband’s life imprisonment, two of my children are in exile – the first-born, Max, and the fourth-born, Lindiwe. The youngest, Zwelakhe, is in jail. My seventeen-year-old grandson who was born of my first son, Max, was arrested in November 1986, and he is also still in jail. And my adopted son, Jogomsi [Jongumzi], is serving five years on Robben Island.

— Albertina Sisulu²

2. Quoted in Russell (1989: 147).

What are known as ‘mother politics’ refer to women’s political participation that centres their identities as mothers, whether biological mothers or not. As Shireen Hassim explains, ‘motherhood provided the enabling framework to draw masses of women into various forms of collective action’ (2018: 898). There has been a long and contested debate among South African feminists about whether the maternal roles that women occupied had transformative feminist ends. For instance, Hassim contends that although the African National Congress (ANC) Women’s League claimed its autonomy from the main body,

the place of the league was clear within the nationalist movement. The Congress was a political family and it replicated the hierarchical form of a patriarchal institution, with the exclusively male National Executive Committee acting as the paternal head of the movement, the Women’s League playing the lesser, maternal role and the Youth League treated as a space of radical militancy needing the guidance of the parents. Women’s political roles were to be defined through the mode of maternalism, acting on behalf of their husbands and children (Hassim 2014: 29).

The source of contention in this debate lies in ascertaining whether the maternal roles that women occupied had transformative feminist ends. As Cherryl Walker explains: ‘Whether motherhood is seen as, at root, a patriarchal or a progressive or potentially or occasionally progressive undertaking will affect how women’s political organisations define and implement their agendas and build their constituencies’ (1995: 423). One of the often-cited interventions on the tensions between motherism and feminism, is the work of historian Julia Wells, specifically the chapter, ‘Maternal Politics in Organizing Black South African Women: The Historical Lesson’ (1998). The first of seven features of motherist movements that Wells identifies is that these movements ‘arise in situations in which women perceive their roles as mothers – ensuring the survival of their children – to be threatened by socially illegitimate force, often government actions’ (Wells 1998: 252). She argues that they are not feminist movements because women ‘are not fighting for their own personal rights as women but [rather] for custodial rights as mothers’

(1998: 253). Wells analyses the resistance of black women to pass laws in May 1913 in Bloemfontein and the march to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956 as examples of ‘motherist’ movements. She argues that they ‘were not general protests against inequitable distribution of wealth or gender discrimination’; ‘they were reactions against the extremities of the apartheid policies when they invaded too deeply into their private worlds’ (1998: 260).

Wells’s (1998: 253) primary argument is that ‘maternal politics are clearly not to be confused with feminism’. She concludes that ‘these movements must be recognised as limited in scope, duration, and success in achieving their goals and, above all, should not be mistaken for political maturity’. Responses by Judy Kimble and Elaine Unterhalter (1982), Nomboniso Gasa (2007) and Zine Magubane (2010) to claims that black women’s use of political motherhood reproduces and limits women’s roles in national liberation have focused on the ways in which these claims reflect a narrow interpretation of feminism that ignores black women’s intersectional oppressions. For one thing, as Magubane reasons, ‘Wells’s statement that “motherism is clearly not feminism” assumes that we know what feminism is when we see it or, alternatively, that there is only one type of feminist consciousness’ (2010: 1009). Magubane shows the ways in which women could not realistically aspire to equal womanhood beyond their blackness, in a context where white women gained the right to vote since ‘woman’ was defined as ‘a person of “wholly European parentage, extraction or descent”’ in the Women’s Enfranchisement Act of 1930 (2010: 984). The apartheid state did not recognise black women’s womanhood as distinct from their blackness. As Magubane further argues, ‘the gains that white women had made with regard to gender equality had been granted to them in order to entrench white supremacy’ (2010: 985). Secondly, black women emphasise their collective identity as mothers because of the fact that apartheid’s socio-economic structure relied on the separation and destruction of the black family and the violence of the South African Defence Force (SADF) in townships and homelands, which presented a daily immediate attack on black women’s families, homes and communities. Kimble and Unterhalter concur, arguing that ‘whereas women in the West have identified the family as a site of women’s oppression, women in

South Africa point to the destruction of “normal family life” as one of the most grievous crimes of apartheid’ (1982: 13). Magubane explains, ‘when we consider the ways in which migrant labour and the pass system dislocated and destroyed families, it would be perfectly understandable had African women aspired to an idealised nuclear family, in which family members live together and the husband’s wage supports them all’ (2010: 988–9). With regard to the presence of the SADF, Magubane quotes a statement from a Uitenhage women’s organisation following the 1985 Langa massacre:

We women work in the white homes in Uitenhage. Every day I go there and look after a white baby. I do so with no harmful thoughts in my heart. I care for that baby and bring him up. And when that baby grows up, he comes into the township and shoots my very own children, playing in the street where I have had to leave them to earn money for their food (Magubane 2010: 1014).

During the colloquium “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’ in 2021, Janet Cherry paid tribute to three women veterans of the struggle for national liberation, Ivy ‘Mam Sukwini’ Cikisa (born in 1937), who was based in Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth), Nonyanga Elizabeth Sibanda (born in 1921), who was active in Cradock and Nompophithiphithi Maggie Booï (born in 1940), who was based in Cape Town. They all passed away in 2021. I was particularly struck by how Cherry spoke about Sibanda, who was known as ‘the General’. Cherry explained that Sibanda was the ‘general who never gave the order to fire’ because she was known for her discipline in confrontations with the police and with the men in her community. Cherry explained that through the lives of these three women, she wanted to make visible the intersections of ‘the armed struggle and the mass mobilisation of the 1980s’ and ‘gender, age and activist identities’. Again, through these three biographies, Cherry was able to show that women’s militancy sat side by side with their identities as mothers and protectors of their communities.

Hassim's research on the Inkatha Women's Brigade helpfully shows that African women's maternal politics are not homogeneous. For example, she shows that women in Inkatha and women affiliated to the United Democratic Front (UDF) reacted differently to the school boycotts in Natal in 1985: 'While Inkatha women were concentrating on disciplining their children, and keeping them in schools, often with the help of the police, women in the UDF supported their children in challenging the state and the police' (1993: 15). As she explains: 'Women's engagement in township politics must be placed within the context of the broader political tradition within which women were acting, which gave rise to very different constructions of the meaning of motherhood' (Hassim 1993: 16). Walker also points out that 'constructs of motherhood according to clearly defined "racial" markers' are 'conceptually and historically flawed' if they ignore the influence of other identities, such as political traditions, on meanings and articulations of political motherhood (1995: 423). The activities and experiences of women in Poqo and in ANC- and UDF-affiliated paramilitary structures, discussed below, illuminate the intersection of maternal politics, political tradition and militancy.

The previous chapter shows that women combatants were routinely harassed, detained and tortured in ways that specifically attacked their womanhood and their motherhood. Winnie Madikizela-Mandela told Diana Russell that what frightened her about solitary confinement was the separation from her children: 'Solitary confinement was frightening at first because my thoughts were with my children all the time. Their father whom they had never known, was in prison' (Russell 1989: 103). In the opening quote to this section, Albertina Sisulu told Russell how six members of her family, including her husband and children, were either in jail or in exile.

Madikizela-Mandela's granddaughter, Zoleka Mandela (who is the daughter of Zindzi Mandela) describes how her mother could strip and ensemble an AK47 in 38 seconds. She recalls that her grandmother referred to their home as a "transit camp", which was then being used to recruit for Umkhonto we Sizwe' (Mandela 2013: 12). She then describes an incident that her mother, Zindzi, often talked about with pride: how Zoleka hid a grenade when they were stopped by the police on their way to fetch Madikizela-Mandela from the airport:

My grandmother describes how on this particular day – a day on which my mother had had a hand grenade in her possession – I spared her a life sentence. I am told that on the return trip, when the car in which we were travelling was surrounded by the police, I boldly offered to conceal a hand grenade in my school bag – even at the age of *nine* I knew that my bag would be the last place the police would look (Mandela 2013: 12–13; emphasis added).

Zoleka Mandela explains that her mother spoke proudly of her daughter's ability to evade the police: 'It always felt like something important to her, in her eyes, it was something I should have been extremely proud of' (2013: 13). Perhaps this is because Zindzi Mandela, who was the child of parents whose lives were entirely sacrificed to the struggle for national liberation, understood that her own nine-year-old daughter needed to be able to defend herself from the police. Perhaps, like herself, Zindzi Mandela foresaw that her daughter would one day need to be able to strip and assemble a weapon in a few seconds.

In *Being Chris Hani's Daughter*, Lindiwe Hani describes the routine that her mother, Limpho Hani, had for making sure that their car did not have a bomb in it before leaving their home in Maseru, Lesotho:

Each morning, before driving to school, Mama would make us stand a few metres away from our green Toyota Corolla, while she systematically opened the bonnet and then checked the underneath before finally turning the ignition. It only dawned on me years later that she was checking for bombs, that our lives were under constant threat (Hani and Ferguson 2017: 11).

Hani, who was about to turn two years old at the time, describes how her family narrowly escaped being attacked by the SADF during the 9 December 1982 raids described in the previous chapter, which led to the killing of Nomsa Ngcipe's brother (Hani and Ferguson 2017: 16; also see Macmillan 2014: 81). She describes how 'the massacre would also become known as Operation Blanket because, during the attack,

some people were wrapped in blankets by the SADF officials and set on fire' (Hani and Ferguson 2017: 17). As she points out, 'the idea of people burning to death, wrapped in the very thing that was normally used as protection and comfort, haunted me for years'. The account speaks to the fact that apartheid violence was felt in intimate spaces both inside and outside South Africa.

The experience of violence at a personal, family and communal level is what shaped the distinct character of politicised, militant and combative motherhood that defined women's collective mobilisation and participation in the armed struggle inside and outside South Africa. Gasa asks: 'Why is the defence of the family seen as deeply conservative? Is this taking the context into account? Young children of school-going age, who were harassed and raided for resident permits, were these women's children. How does feminism clash with the protection of one's children? Does it have to?' (2007: 214).

She also maintains that the reduction of black women's activism to maternal politics creates a 'Berlin Wall between blackness and liberation struggle on the one hand and feminism on the other', binaries that are 'completely unnecessary and do not make sense of black women's experiences' (Gasa, 2007: 214). As Kimble and Unterhalter explain: 'South African women have approached the liberation struggle from several angles over time, based primarily on their own immediate experiences as victims of apartheid legislation . . . These demands were never isolated as specifically "women's struggle", however. They were always situated within the broader struggle against the major source of oppression – apartheid' (1982: 32).

Meghan Healy-Clancy argues about the Federation of South African Women in the 1950s that 'public motherhood structured women's politics. And the meanings of motherhood – and of family, of gender, of generation – were changing through women's politics' (2017: 861). Kim Miller also explains that the

iconography of militarised motherhood offers a different vision of what it meant to be a political mother. Rather than reinforce the more narrow understandings of motherhood that were previously

described, these representations suggest a more nuanced political role for women. They depict women as mothers, who are concurrently active participants in a revolutionary struggle, and who are concerned not only with the welfare of their children, but also with widespread social change (Miller 2009: 70).

In her article, 'Motherhood as Activism in the Angolan People's War, 1961–1975', Selina Makana says: 'In retelling the armed struggle as a mother's struggle, I underscore the point that as patriotic mothers, women made the tough choices to give up something of value – their loved ones – in order to get something of greater value – the freedom of their country from the yoke of colonialism' (2017: 355).

The experiences of combative mothers across the different periods of struggle show that Madikizela-Mandela's form of militant motherhood is no exception. It was the rule for women who resisted apartheid inside South Africa, whose resistance was responded to with violence against them and their families. As Madikizela-Mandela argued, she and thousands of older women and young people were 'the cannon fodder . . . the foot soldiers' who carried out the practical mandate of the 'people's war' (in Mofokeng 2018).

Hassim is right to point to 'an underlying tension between the power that motherhood is accorded in nationalist symbolism, and the powerlessness that women experience in society' (1993: 20). Hindsight allows us to appreciate some of the concerns raised by Wells (1991), Hassim (1993) and Walker (1995) about the limits of political motherhood. Today, it is not possible to say that political motherhood represents a powerful force in any political party in South Africa. Hassim's later reading of Madikizela-Mandela's violence and radical symbolism in post-apartheid South Africa accurately shows that 'there may be more continuities than differences in the place that she occupied in the symbolic politics of anti-apartheid nationalism and in that of post-apartheid radicalism' (2018: 912). Indeed, while women are 'heralded as the martyrs of the struggle' (Hassim 1993: 20), women as individuals and as a collective hold no substantive power and authority in any political organisation in contemporary South Africa.

'Forget your nakedness, and fight with both hands': Poqo women contesting Bantu authority

Wena Matanzima, usisigebengu uthengisa ngabantwana base Afrika . . . ubulala abantwana base Transkei [You, Matanzima, are a criminal. You are selling out the children of Africa . . . you are killing the children of Transkei].

— Mayibuye Choir, 'Wena Matanzima'

In his book about banishment under apartheid, *The Forgotten People: Political Banishment under Apartheid*, Saleem Badat (2012) correctly notes that the archive on the anti-apartheid struggle tends to be centred on the violence in urban settings and the forms of resistance used by the national liberation movements. In this regard, 'the iconic and celebrated figures of the national liberation struggle have tended to be political activists who had cities as their theatres of action and struggle' (Badat 2012: xxi). Luli Callinicos argues, similarly, that 'scholars in the 1980s – with few exceptions – tended to focus on the urban challenge and to discuss the potential and relative merits of the liberation and labour movements' (2015: 154). Philip Bonner also explains that while the 'urban masses' have been dominant actors in the ANC since the 1950s and more so in the 1980s, 'when this urban bias is read back on the twentieth century, the urban masses barely featured as a major national political force' (2012: 2). As Badat points out, 'It is not so much that the rural militants, and their activities and courageous struggle against oppression, exploitation and injustice, have been by and large forgotten. In large part, they are still to be fully written about and to enter popular consciousness' (2012: xxii).

In *South Africa: The Peasants' Revolt*, Govan Mbeki describes the 'Bantu homelands', which consisted of '260 small and separate areas scattered throughout the country', as

South Africa's backwaters, primitive rural slums, soil-eroded and underdeveloped, lacking power resources and without developed communication systems. They have no cities, no industries, and few sources of employment. They are congested and permanently distressed areas where the inhabitants live on

a narrow ledge of starvation, where a drought, as experienced recently in the northern areas, leads inevitably to famine. They are areas drained of their menfolk, for their chief export is labour, and while the men work on white-owned farms and in mines and industry, their women-folk and old people pursue a primitive agriculture incapable of providing even subsistence. The 'homelands' are mere reserves of labour, with a population not even self-sustaining, supplying no more than a supplement to the low wages paid on the mines and farms (Mbeki 1964: 13).

As Badat notes, rural residents did not passively submit to the encroachment of the state in their lives, as the 'existence of anti-dipping movements and the role played by independent church and chieftaincy movements in reserve-based resistance' against betterment schemes and other forms of state control on land and rural life show, well before the formal introduction of apartheid in 1948 (2012: 36). The rising 'hostility' of rural residents was articulated in the various revolts of the 1950s and 1960s, such as the Hurutshe resistance in the Zeerust district of the Western Transvaal, 1954–1959, in the Northern Transvaal; the Witziesshoek opposition to the introduction of the pass to women in 1957; the uprisings in Sekhukhuneland in 1958; in Thembuland in the late 1950s; and in Mpondoland in the 1960s (Badat 2012: 37).

The introduction of the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 was the first step by the National Party in its attempts to implement its policy of separate development. Under the Act, the Minister of Bantu Affairs appointed chiefs and headmen as the new tribal authorities, which the minister could remove at any time, at his discretion (Mbeki 1964). The chiefs and headmen became responsible for the 'allocation of land, the welfare and pension system and development' (South African History Online 2016). The Act robbed rural residents of any opportunity to participate in the appointment of authorities who ruled over them as the 'minister and his officials had strict control over the membership of the Authorities; and members of the general public could be excluded from their meetings' (Mbeki 1964: 45). Apartheid only exacerbated the difficulties of life for black people in the countryside:

For all the years after the Nationalist government came to power, it had brought only hardship to the African people: the tightening up of the pass laws, the introduction of inferior education, the banning and banishing of political leaders; the growing ferocity of the police. The people were becoming increasingly bitter and hostile (Mbeki 1964: 43–4).

The ‘banishing’ that Mbeki refers to was a method of punishment used by the state ‘directed specifically at opponents of the state’ (Badat 2012: 33), who were all exclusively African. Banishment involved the ‘uprooting of political activists from a particular locale and their expulsion to specifically designated areas, usually completely foreign to them, within the national boundaries’. According to Badat, banishment had its roots in the Natal Code of Native Law of 1891, which gave the governor the power to remove any ‘native’ from one part of the colony to another. The Native Administration Amendment Act of 1956, under the National Party, allowed the state to banish a person without prior notice (Badat 2012: 31). Badat says that the total number of banished people between 1948 and 1982 (the last year of legal banishment) was 160. Banishment was highest in the 1950s, at the height of ‘peasant revolts’. When Gilbert Hani, the father of Chris Hani, was banished from Cape Town ‘back to Western Thembuland in 1962, he chose exile rather than to live under [Kaiser] Matanzima’s oppressive rule’ (Gibbs 2011: 680). In 1963, the Transkei became the first Bantustan to formally accept separate development, under Matanzima as the prime minister. According to Timothy Gibbs, one of Hani’s ‘favourite pastimes was to make harassing phone calls to Kaiser Matanzima’, who would respond with ‘threats of coming to Maseru to beat up Gilbert’ (2011: 681).

The largest number of banished people, 23 (18 men and 5 women) came from GaMatlala, a rural village in Pietersburg (now Polokwane). The residents of GaMatlala militantly resisted ‘Bantu Authorities, Bantu education and passes for women, and the state’s attempt to impose unpopular, pliant chiefs’ (Badat 2012: 38). Badat profiles Makwena Matlala, an acting chieftess of GaMatlala, who directly opposed the government when the location was declared a ‘betterment area’, without the people’s consent. In 1950, Matlala was banished to Hammanskraal

by the Department of Native Affairs in Pietersburg, because her presence in GaMatlala was 'inimical to the peace, order and good government of the Natives' (Badat 2012: 42). After refusing banishment, and a brief stay in Atteridgeville in Pretoria, in 1951 she was eventually forcibly banished to Zwelitsha township in King William's Town (now Qonce) in the Eastern Cape, far away from her family and supporters in GaMatlala and Atteridgeville, in a place where she did not even speak or understand the local language. Helen Joseph visited Matlala in King William's Town in 1962 and observed that although Matlala was a chieftess, because she was 'a black woman she could be insulted, slapped and stripped. From that humiliation she had gone to her banishment' (Badat 2012: 45). Her banishment order was only withdrawn in February 1966.

Banished people were not only separated from their communities of support, but they were often sent to remote areas that plunged their lives into extreme economic and social deprivation. As Badat's work shows, banishment was a forceful tool to silence rural activists. It was then extended as a method of suppression to activists in townships in the 1970s, the most well-documented banishments being those of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, banished from Soweto to the Free State town of Brandfort (renamed Winnie Mandela in August 2021), and Mamphela Ramphele, who was banished from King William's Town to Lenyenye location in Tzaneen, both in 1977 (Badat 2012). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Pumza Dyantyi, who was arrested as part of the National Youth Organisation (NAYO) Seven and sent to John Vorster Square, was banished to the Transkei. She escaped to exile in 1978, before serving her banning order.

The PAC's military wing had its strongest support among rural residents who were frustrated by the state and traditional authority. As Lodge points out, the 'movement developed organisationally from the bottom up, adapting itself to the social institutions it found around it . . . fuelled to a much greater extent by locally relevant anxieties and preoccupations, particularly those emanating from the countryside' (1983: 13). He notes that the 'Cape Province and the Transkei contained the main centres of PAC activity' (1983: 10). In Jixini, a village in Mqanduli, Mthatha, I interviewed women Poqo members who were arrested in 1963, at the peak of Poqo activity. The PAC had planned

a national insurrection in April 1963 that was directed by new party leader, Potlako Leballo, from Lesotho, until 'colonial authorities in Basutoland arrested those PAC leaders they could find in Maseru and closed down the PAC's office confiscating a quantity of documentation including membership lists allegedly containing 100,000 names and addresses' (Lodge 1983: 15).

Mildred Nonotse Daphu, born in 1928, became involved with Poqo at the time when Chief Sabata Dalindyebo opposed the imposition of the Bantu Authorities Act that would force him to accept the imposition of separate development by the state. The contestation was between Dalindyebo and Kaiser Matanzima, who supported and promoted separate development and was appointed as a regional chief emigrant of Tembuland in 1958. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Final Report notes that in 'December 1962, Poqo members made an abortive attempt to assassinate Paramount Chief Kaiser Matanzima at his home at Qamata near Cofimvaba . . . Seven Poqo members were killed and three police officers seriously injured in the encounter' (TRC 1998: 48). The report traces political activity in Jixini in 1962, where members of the 'Jixini branch of Poqo planned an attack on white people near the area; but before this campaign could take off, more than one hundred Poqo members were arrested' (TRC 1998: 48). Nomvo Booi (2012: 33) was arrested in July 1962, with one of the charges against her being for 'addressing a gathering in Mqanduli'.

Mildred Nonotse Daphu traces her involvement with Poqo, under the leadership of Mamfengu Leonard Mzolisa, during this contested time between Dalindyebo and Matanzima: 'I became involved in PAC in 1963 . . . It was in the times of Sabatha Dalindyebo, it was the time of that which could not pass our lips! You cannot tell! It was the time of that which could not pass our lips!' (Daphu, interview). She was arrested with others in Mqanduli while at a Poqo meeting about how to fight the Boers. When I asked what they were planning to do, she said:

I would say that they were building a force, soldiers who would challenge white people. Their intention was to build weapons to fight white people. They were challenging the rule of the Boers . . . they believed at the time that they wanted to get the

land back. They believed that the enemy was the whites who took their land. They were looking to fight with the whites (Daphu, interview).

Following the arrests, they were given five-year suspended sentences and banned from participating in any political activity. However, they continued to attend meetings at night and many of them were in and out of jail, as they were known to be politically active by the informants within their own community. The women I interviewed spoke of constant harassment whenever they were seen by the police in public, especially at funerals. Zile Xolo, the Jixini PAC chairperson at the time of the interview, noted that the young PAC/APLA members of the 1980s were inspired and guided by older women.

Nocollege Mzolisa, also born in 1928, was arrested in Mqanduli. When she was arrested, she sent her young child home with other people. The child died while she was in prison. The only thing she would say of the matter is that the ‘child that I left behind, when I was in jail, I came back, and they were dead. What have I benefited?’ (Mzolisa, interview). Some women are said to have given birth in jail and others died there. I was told that the remains of activists who died at Fort Glamorgan Prison, better known as KwaNongqongqo, in East London, had still not been returned to their families.

Miriam Makeba’s song, ‘Nongqongqo (To Those We Love)’, is a lament about the imprisoned leaders of the PAC and ANC, Robert Sobukwe and Nelson Mandela and an appeal to Chief Albert Luthuli and all Africans to act. During the colloquium “‘*Sobashaya ngamatye*’: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’ in 2021, the award-winning jazz musician Nomfundo Xaluva sang a rendition of the song, replacing Sobukwe’s and Mandela’s names with those of women political prisoners, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and Thandi Modise. Used this way, ‘Nongqongqo’ is symbolically deployed as a reference to political imprisonment under apartheid.

Macmillan describes a story told by Sabata Dalindyebo, who left South Africa in 1980 for Zambia, where he died in 1986, to motivate for the ‘intensification of the armed struggle and a move away from sabotage towards attacks on the personnel running the apartheid system’:

The wife of a man who appears to be losing shouts: 'What's the matter, my husband? You are much stronger than him and a better fighter, but he's defeating you. You are losing because you have only one stick in one hand, while your other hand is useless because it is stupidly holding a blanket to cover your nakedness. Drop the blanket, forget your nakedness, and fight with both hands!' (Macmillan 2014: 99).

Dalindyebo was well aware of the militancy of the women in Transkei, who had unequivocally opposed Bantu authority. As the experience of the Poqo women shows, for many of those who stayed inside the country and refused to be silenced by the apartheid regime, life was a cycle of arrests and returning home. Pamela Reynolds points out that the 'repetition and return to the township' pattern had begun in the 1960s with Poqo members operating underground in Mqanduli (2013: 32). By the 1980s, it had become a countrywide phenomenon, in both urban and rural settings.

Combative mothers and ungovernability

The period that is known as 'ungovernability' refers to the township uprisings that 'engulfed black communities in the period from 1984 to 1989' (Cherry 2007: 282). Belinda Bozzoli, writing about the 'Six Day War' between residents and police in Alexandra township in Johannesburg in February 1986, argues that the township as a space in the 1980s represented a physical, legal, cultural and militarised enclosure for black people (2004: 7–11). Similarly, Debby Bonnin, writing about the transformation of space during the political violence in KwaZulu-Natal between ANC-aligned UDF and the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), argues that 'spaces of everyday life were to be reterritorialised and new spaces and boundaries within the township recreated' (2000: 307). Cherry explains that while the apartheid government managed to contain the violence within townships, 'it could not gain the legitimacy necessary to ensure economic and political stability. It was out of this impasse that the negotiations for a democratic South Africa began' (2007: 282).

In *Violence and Solace: The Natal Civil War in Late-Apartheid South Africa*, Mxolisi Mchunu estimates that ‘as a result of the violence between Inkatha and the UDF, some 12 000 people died from 1985 to 1996 in KwaZulu-Natal . . . it is estimated that between 200 000 and 500 000 refugees fled the conflict in the province between 1984–1994’ (2020: 2). Mchunu is a survivor of the war in KwaShange between 1987 and 1996. He writes about how his mother risked her life between the home of her employer, where she worked as a domestic worker, and her home in KwaShange, where she did not know if she would find her children alive on her return, and they did not know if she would travel to and back from work safely. Mchunu describes how they slept in a nearby forest to keep safe:

On her return, my mother would pace up and down, locking the house and surrounding rondavels and preparing herself and the younger children for another night in the nearby forest . . . Her employer had given her three sleeping bags for the cold outdoors. She got up in the morning of the following day, not too early because Inkatha would attack the village at that time of the morning. She eventually left the forest with us children at 04h30 because she had to catch the bus at 05h30 in order to go to work. Her explanation was: ‘One had to respect the employers because I knew that I would need their assistance one day, so I had to pretend that things were normal’ (Mchunu 2020: 15).

Mchunu comments that his mother ‘claimed that throughout the time “the only thing that I was concerned about was my children’s whereabouts”’ (2020: 13). He is clear that what he and his family survived was a war.

In her doctoral thesis on the township of KwaZakhele in Gqeberha, Cherry (2001) argues that most townships had been contained by the state by late 1977, following the Soweto 1976 uprising. However, with the formation of the UDF in 1983, in the Port Elizabeth-Uitenhage townships, there was the emergence of civic organisations such as the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO), formed in 1979, and its allied organisations: the Port Elizabeth Women’s Organisation

(PEWO), the Port Elizabeth Youth Congress (PEYCO) and the Congress of South African Students (COSAS). Cherry comments that ‘when the township revolt began in September 1984, residents of KwaZakele were ready to play their part in the historic drama that was about to unfold’ (2001: 90).

In places such as Gqeberha, members of the MK command, such as Govan Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba, had laid the foundation for armed struggle activity since the formation of the organisation. For instance, Nondwe Mankahla was involved in MK’s sabotage campaigns from 1961 in Gqeberha, where she was a volunteer for the *New Age* newspaper, working with Mbeki and Mhlaba (Mankahla, interview; see also Bundy 2012: 87).³ She explains that she was asked by Mbeki and Mhlaba to courier parcels, as she did for *New Age*, and only later learned that the parcels held equipment to assemble a bomb:

I became involved with MK just after its launch. They started meeting here in PE [Port Elizabeth]. Since I worked at that office [*New Age* newspaper], Mr Mbeki and Raymond Mhlaba used to meet at that office and ask me to carry a parcel to some place. And this parcel is fruit. I would fetch the parcel from a place here in Govan Mbeki [Avenue in central Gqeberha]; I did not know what I was carrying. I would take the parcel to them . . . I would learn later that the equipment was actually explosives . . . The MK then was focused on targeting certain areas (Mankahla, interview).

She says that when Govan Mbeki disappeared in 1962, she worked with Vuyisile Mini, who was part of the MK Eastern Cape High Command. But the apartheid regime had heightened its suppression,

3. Nondwe Mankahla is well known for the role she played in defying the state’s pressure for her to testify against the accused in the *The State versus Ndou and 21 Others* in 1969, which included Winnie Madikizela-Mandela (whose prison cell was next to Mankahla’s), Martha Dhlamini, Thokozile Mngoma, Rita Ndzanga, Joyce Sikhakhane and Shanthie Naidoo. Her courage and defiance are described in Shanthini Naidoo’s book *Women in Solitary: Inside the Female Resistance to Apartheid* (2020: 19). Her earlier role as a MK combatant is less well known.

which eventually led to Mbeki and Mhlaba's arrest, and Mini's arrest and execution. Mankahla herself spent time in jail in 1969. Upon her release in 1970, she was active in PEWO until 1994.

As all these cases of resistance – from Alexandra in Johannesburg to KwaZulu-Natal, Gqeberha to Cradock – and many others make clear, the 1980s marked a turning point in South Africa. It was the violence by the apartheid state and the resistance to it that would ultimately lead to the unbanning of the ANC and PAC and other liberation movements in 1990. Thousands of individuals across the country had heeded the call and made the country 'ungovernable'. The accounts below illuminate women's roles in the township uprisings of the 1980s.

Church: Fezeka Klaas and Ma-Mde

The church emerged as a site in which women found a space to strategise against apartheid violence and the violence that erupted between UDF and the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO) in Port Elizabeth in 1985. While schools, funerals and stadiums were spaces where the young and old protested, the church provided a space where women could use religion to discreetly plan political activities. Fatima Meer argues that 'religion, particularly Christianity, is an important factor in bringing women together' (1985: 14). Scholars such as Beverley Haddad have shown that women's prayer unions, known as *manyano* in the Methodist Church, had been introduced by missionaries from 1906 onwards, as spaces where African women could pray together and for the missionaries 'to prepare the young converts for domestic service by teaching them skills such as sewing, washing, and laundering as they saw appropriate to an ideal Victorian home' (2004: 5). She maintains that these spaces took on a new meaning for African women in rural areas where they used the women-only groups as a space in which to deal with separation from their husbands and children in urban areas, as influx control laws made their access to the cities difficult (Haddad 2004). Women in urban areas used the weekly prayer meetings to cope with routine racism in the workplace and the psychological challenges of separation from their families. Meer argues that at the height of apartheid, 'the Manyanos converted temporarily into protest groups against apartheid' (1985: 14; see also Ngcobozi 2017).

It was thus not surprising to hear accounts from women about how they used the church to mobilise with other women about how to protect the young people who were being chased by the police and how to respond to police violence. Fezeka Klaas, born in 1948 in New Brighton in Gqeberha, said about church meetings:

We used to have prayer meetings at Ngesi, at a church in Ngesi. We would carry the Bible, but we would be discussing politics . . . We would pretend that we were reading the scripture by holding the Bible during the meeting, while we are planning what we will do politically (Klaas, interview).

She also mentioned that they would visit people detained in prison, especially those children whose parents had died, whom they would visit 'as their parents would' (Klaas, interview). They would also visit 'cadres who returned home and the parents had died. We used to visit the jails, as their parents would.' They would also confront black police officers, who were notorious for arresting 'the children even if [they] did not see them doing something'.

Ma-Mde specifically spoke about women's actions during the violence between the UDF and AZAPO.⁴ From 1985 onwards, a tense battle between the UDF and AZAPO 'tore Port Elizabeth townships apart . . . rallies by hundreds of youths at the houses of political opponents were often followed by arson attacks and sometimes by necklacing' (Buur 2006: 739; see also TRC 1998, Vol. 3). Ma-Mde narrated how women tried to call for peace between the UDF and AZAPO by wearing white headbands:

We wore the head wraps so that they would think that we were gathering for a church service, maybe we were Zionists and so on. Yes. But mostly, there was the fighting between AZAPO and UDF. We wore the headband because it had two meanings: because (1) they would think that we were members of Zionist

4. When I refer to elders, who only gave me their surnames when I interviewed them, I prefix their surname with 'Ma', which is short for 'Mother'.

church; and (2) we want peace between the children. We wore the headbands to call for peace between the children. We used to pray. We would come together with others in Walmer, Centenary, the place next to the library – it was just a field then – and the Hippos [armoured vehicles] would arrive, and on one side there would be UDF, and on the other AZAPO. It would be that confrontation. The Boers would get there and shoot towards the UDF. We would ask ourselves, why not AZAPO, which was also a party of black people? Why is that when the Boers arrive, they shoot one side and not all of them? (Ma-Mde, interview)

The use of the colour white to symbolise a call for peace seems to be a common factor for women in diverse societies, who use their identity as mothers to make claims about violence in their societies. The Mothers of Plaza de Mayo in Argentina wore ‘white head scarves’ when they gathered every Thursday at 15h30 in front of the presidential palace in Buenos Aires, calling for the return of the 30 000 Argentinians who were ‘abducted, tortured, and permanently disappeared’ in the ‘Dirty War’ under ‘consecutive military juntas’ between 1976 and 1983 (Taylor 2001: 97). Diana Taylor argues that ‘the Mothers had to manipulate the maternal image that was already rigorously controlled by the State’, as they made the claim that it was ‘precisely their maternal responsibilities as “good” mothers that took them to the Plaza in search of their children’ (2001: 100). As was the case in South Africa, the ‘Mothers’ notion of motherhood had gradually become political rather than biological’, as ‘they came to consider themselves the mothers of all the disappeared, not just their own offspring’ (Taylor 2001: 102).

The case of Liberia Mass Action for Peace (LMAP) is a similar example, as the women in Liberia came together in 2003 at the height of what is known as the Second Liberian Civil War. They wore white every day and gathered next to the road that President Charles Taylor drove on his way to work, and in the markets, where they petitioned for all parties to participate in the peace negotiations in Accra, Ghana (Gbowee and Mithers 2011). They wore white to symbolise their call for peace and to emphasise their non-partisan nature (Gbowee and Mithers, 2011). Leymah Gbowee, one of the leaders of LMAP, was awarded the

2011 Nobel Peace Prize, together with former Liberian president, Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, and Yemeni activist Tawakkol Karman, 'for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace building work' (Prasch 2015: 187). In 'Maternal Bodies in Militant Protest: Leymah Gbowee and the Rhetorical Agency of African Motherhood', Allison Prasch argues that

Gbowee and the other protestors claimed their maternity as culturally symbolic grounds for their collective political action. Although they had been targets of sexual violence, these women refused to allow their perpetrators to detract from their maternal agency. Instead, they responded by asserting themselves as biological mothers and as advocates for Liberia's women and children. This rhetorical process constituted LMAP protesters as powerful political agents while simultaneously reaffirming the sacred role that 'mother' plays in Liberian culture (Prasch 2015: 189).

In May 2021, Sureerat Chiwarak, a mother in Bangkok, Thailand, publicly shaved her head 'in a protest to support her activist son, jailed for weeks without bail on criminal charges of insulting Thailand's powerful king' (Tanakasempipat 2021). Chiwarak is one of six mothers whose children have been arrested without bail. In agitating for their children to be released, the mothers have 'staged several quiet protests, standing together for one hour and 12 minutes – a reference to Article 112 in the criminal code on insulting the monarchy – next to cardboard cutouts of their children and showing the three-finger salute of defiance to demand that they be granted bail'.

It appears that in instances of war, women across the world subvert tropes of motherhood as essentially peaceful and the colour white as a symbol of peace to challenge oppressive regimes, towards the achievement of peace. The theme of protecting their families, especially children, is a central motivating theme in the activities of mothers who routinely put their own bodies forward in a rhetorical protest against oppressive forms of power.

Protecting the children: Ma-Mabhengeza, Ma-Mafutha and Victoria Nagetsane

The theme of protecting children was a central motivator of women's actions in the townships in the 1980s. Writing about women's roles in securing their communities in the violence in KwaZulu-Natal, Bonnin quotes a woman who said that women were 'in the front not because each one is looking after her own child, but all children. It does not matter whose child, a woman assists a child no matter whose child it is' (Bonnin 1997: 39). The experiences of women who were members of PEWO in Gqeberha speak to such a reality, and the extent to which the mothers put their bodies on the line for the protection of not just their children, but all the children of the struggle.

According to Cherry (2011), Amabutho was a self-defence unit based in Gqeberha. Its formation was not authorised by MK, but they 'organised themselves according to MK military hierarchies and carried out MK strategy as they understood it' (2011: 91). Ma-Mabhengeza was born in 1944 and was an active member of PEWO. She used to hide members of Amabutho at her home. She spoke about how they used to rearrange their yards, so that the young people would be able to jump over the fence to get in easily:

I would say that the children would come to me when there was a problem in New Brighton. They would say, 'Mama, we would like you to hide these people here.' I would say, 'Okay, my children, hide them here.' . . . We just opened our homes and opened ways for them to get out when they were running from AZAPO. They would open the gate and go (Ma-Mabhengeza, interview).

Fezeka Klaas had a son who was a member of Amabutho. She protected him and others at her home, recounting:

One of my children was a member of Amabutho. He died in 2008. When they were being chased by the enemy, we would open our home to them. Sometimes the enemy was here. I would

let them inside the room, so that they can sleep. I would stand outside and when the enemy has passed, I would throw a stone on top of the roof. I would do it like that (Klaas, interview).

Their role in 'protecting' young men from the police often placed the women in the direct line of danger, as Ma-Mafutha articulated:

One night a bullet came through the window: *Twaa!* It hit the wall, the wall in the kitchen. We were protected by God because I cannot tell you how we survived. I was cooking, making supper: *Twaa!* I reasoned that he was shooting at us; he wanted my life as well. I used to be woken up all the time by the Boers. They were looking for the young men. They would wake them up, beat them and leave with them . . . that is the life we lived (Ma-Mafutha, interview).

Victoria Nageetsane, born in 1936, talked about the constant police harassment in her home, because of her political activities and suspicions that she was hiding members of Amabutho:

Do you remember when they used to come into the house? Yhu! You will see it [the Hippo] stopping at your house. My husband liked his sleep, so I would get up to find out what they wanted and they would be coming to our house. They would get in looking for me; they would have heard about a meeting taking place somewhere. They would be here to intimidate . . . they would call out my husband and say, 'You had a meeting somewhere and you didn't tell us. Get in!' My husband would be quiet and relaxed. I would say, 'Wait for me to get dressed.' You would search for whatever you were wearing the previous day. They were like that (Nageetsane, interview).

These accounts of experiences provide details of women's specific roles in the civic movements and the paramilitary organisations, such as Amabutho, during the township uprisings of the 1980s. In his book about the Soweto uprising, Sifiso Mxolisi Ndlovu (2017) argues that

black parents are often seen as conservative and unsupportive of militant youth. His book and the accounts above show the specific ways in which youth militancy relied on combative and protective motherhood. The mothers' own political identification with mass mobilisation for democratic change shaped their support and protection of the young people in their communities, thus demonstrating the link between 'mother politics' and political traditions.

Young women and township uprisings

Cherry (2007) argues that the literature on the young lions, who were central in realising the ANC's call for ungovernability, is often represented in gender-neutral terms, or in specifically masculine terms. Nyasha Karimakwenda also shows that 'the youth known as comrades, marshals, young lions, *amaqabane* or *amabutho*' that emerged during the 1980s are taken to be masculine because the 'struggle voice was a male voice' (2019: 562). Malose Langa and Gillian Eagle argue that young men who participated in a former self-defence unit in the Kathorus area in Johannesburg 'revealed that there was a shared expectation that SDU [self-defence unit] members should be strong, tough, fearless, and violent in order to prove their militarised masculinity' (2008: 159). The older women discussed above as 'combative mothers' did not mention hiding young women in their homes and there is a lacuna in the extant literature on the role of young women who were also 'young lions' at the height of violence in the 1980s. Emily Bridger's book *Young Women against Apartheid: Gender, Youth and South Africa's Liberation Struggle* (2021) about young women's roles in COSAS in Johannesburg in the 1980s is a welcome addition, but further research is crucial.

When I began observations of Amabutho in 2012, I was haunted by a woman who shared with me that for the longest time, she could not eat meat, because she had seen 'too many people blown up' in front of her. She was referring to the people who were accused of being informers – *impimpi* – to the police about the political activities of individuals and collectives in the township. Those accused, whether innocent or guilty, were often violently killed by 'the notorious necklace, in which suspects had rubber tire placed around their necks, were doused with petrol and burnt alive' (Kynoch 2018: 18). Karimakwenda argues that 'cases of necklacing were gendered', in that 'along with rape

and abduction, necklacing formed part of a web of violent acts through which men often acting with impunity, punished women for performing their gender “wrong” (2019: 561). Bridger makes it clear that ‘the form of violence present in young women’s lives was not political, but sexual’ (2021: 38).

Gary Kynoch explains that thousands of those who participated in the civic movements and the self-defence units across the country ‘viewed their involvement less as a matter of choice than as a fight for the survival of their families’ (2018: 143). Similar to Bridger’s (2021) study, for the women who were in their teens and younger who were part of PEYCO and Amabutho, violence in their schools and unrest at schools and funerals were key sites of struggle.

Personal/communal violence and unrest in schools: Nkosazana Sobantu, Ma-Boniswa and Ma-Thandiswa

Nkosazana Sobantu was born in New Brighton in 1964 and shared with me that she became involved politically because her brother had been arrested at the age of fourteen and taken to Robben Island. Following the arrest, her family was subject to constant harassment by the police:

My brother was in jail for fourteen years. He was arrested in 1978 in Robben Island. So there was no chance that I would stay at home and fold my arms when the Boers used to frequent our house and they would torture my mother, kick the doors, you see? It was not nice . . . They would abuse her. They would instruct her to show her documents that were not there. They would even dig into the floor looking for ANC documents that do not exist (Sobantu, interview).

The constant harassment at home was combined with the unrest in schools at the pinnacle of the boycotts and further complicated by the violence between UDF and AZAPO:

There was no stability . . . I was doing Standard Seven [Grade Nine] then, and it was not nice; there was violence in the

community, and the schools were shut down. Then we returned in '87 . . . AZAPO was fighting with the ANC. It was difficult in those days – people's houses used to be guarded. Even our house at that time, used to be watched . . . So we lived like that, such that I only wrote my Standard Ten [Matric] in 1989. I was staying with relatives because of the unrest we had to leave the house because of my brother (Sobantu, interview).

Ma-Boniswa,⁵ also born in 1964 in New Brighton, spoke about the impact of the AZAPO-UDF clashes on her family:

My sister in Motherwell . . . used to get beaten by the Boers here at home. And during the clashes between UDF and AZAPO, the clashes happened near our home. We used to get searched. We did not stay at home. Our mother was also involved in politics but I can't speak about the details of her involvement because I was young. We used to hide things in our garden, like the PEYCO T-shirts (Ma-Boniswa, interview).

She spoke, too, about the presence of police at school, where they held some of their meetings: 'We also used to meet at Newell [High School] to have our meetings and often there would be shooting. There were soldiers who monitored the school. There was a person who was shot close to our home, he died at our gate' (Ma-Boniswa, interview).

To defend themselves and attack the state, Ma-Thandiswa spoke about how they assembled petrol bombs because it was too dangerous to be caught carrying weapons:

We used to make petrol bombs. We used to put paraffin, sand, put them on a matchstick and put petrol and spirit. Those are the things we used to destroy, you see? Because if you had arms, you would get arrested. What Amabutho used to do by hand are hand grenades and petrol bombs (Ma-Thandiswa, interview).

5. I use Ma-Boniswa and Ma-Thandiswa's first names because they did not provide their surnames.

These accounts reveal that women's everyday life was consumed by the presence of violence. At home and in schools, they found themselves under direct attack from the state. In their work as marshals for Amabutho, they found that funeral sites became key places of struggle between themselves and the apartheid state. They defended the space and mobilised within it.

Funerals: Fundiswa Menzeni and Tiny Tatelo Mokoena

This young man says he and his friends refuse to work with us even though they know we can no longer cope with the digging; day and night. He and his friends say we must take a stand, refuse to dig graves for people dying all the time.

That way we too, would make a statement; about this unnecessary war of girls and women raped, of children dying in the crossfire while playing, of families fleeing homes, of brother against brother. This young man says no freedom can come from so much bloodshed and mayhem.

This young man doesn't know that we are women disguised as men,
We started digging graves when men disappeared, fell dead,
He doesn't know that when we send him away to sleep at sunset,
we start another mission of hiding women and children in these graves
so they can at least get some sleep, suckle their infants in peace.
This young man doesn't know that to an army of women gravediggers,
freedom is taking an energizing nap, on the other side of the hill.

— Makhosazana Xaba, 'Digging for Freedom'

Funerals became sites of protest during the anti-apartheid struggle. Mamphela Ramphele argues that male and female bodies were made political in particularly gendered ways:

The body politic depicts and treats the female body as incomplete and inadequate to the task of representing nobility, heroism, and public office. The female body usually requires a male body to render it whole and acceptable, and yet when the man's body, having lost its vitality, lies helplessly without form, its

helplessness and lifelessness acquire meaning from the proximity of the relatively frail body of the widow (1996: 103).

An important part of the actions of the young was the role they played as marshals at protests and funerals. Every interview I did with the young women who were part of PEYCO and Amabutho described their encounters with the police at funerals. In the film *Long Night's Journey into Day*, Nyameka Goniwe, the wife of Matthew Goniwe, recounts the atmosphere at the burial of her husband:

It was as if the ground was moving. It was just in defiance, a statement which was being conveyed to the government that there is nothing that you are going to be able to control. I can't even explain that kind of spirit. It was a funeral but I felt like it was a liberation day for many. I think that is what lifted me that day . . . (Hoffmann and Reid 2000).

The Cradock Four (Matthew Goniwe, Fort Calata, Sparrow Mkonto and Sicelo Mhlauli) were anti-apartheid activists from the town of Cradock, who were abducted and murdered on their way from Gqeberha by the apartheid security branch on 27 June 1985. Then apartheid prime minister, P.W. Botha, declared a state of emergency on 20 July 1985, the day of the funeral of the Cradock Four. Fundiswa Menzeni, born in 1963 in Gqeberha, was a marshal at the funeral of the Cradock Four and explains how marshals of Amabutho used to carry coffins at the funerals of activists:

We used to get beaten during prayer, protest at a funeral while carrying the coffin . . . We would carry the coffin on our shoulders to the church, if the service was in church or to Dan Qeqe [stadium]. We would need to be the first ones in Dan Qeqe and do the guard of honour, so that people would not force their way in . . . I remember in 1986, Amabutho were being shot at in the church that I pointed out to you to pass as you were coming here. We were at a funeral. That church was not there then. We were shot by the Boers there, and they poured teargas inside,

while Amabutho were carrying the coffins. My mother fell during the commotion there, while people were falling on top of the coffins. She was never fine after that. She died in 1986 on the 3rd of November; she was buried on the 15th of November. She inhaled the tear gas and she was never okay after that. Even I use some medical treatment for high blood pressure, but still I've never stopped fighting (Menzeni, interview).

Nkosazana Sobantu spoke about the fact that they would not be able to take someone who was shot to hospital: 'We would notice that someone was shot by the pellets, especially pellets, because we would not take the person to hospital because if they do, you know that the police would arrest them' (Sobantu, interview).

Tiny Tatelo Mokoena, born in 1963 in Mamelodi, Pretoria, a former deputy secretary of COSAS in Mamelodi, publicity secretary of the Mamelodi Youth Organisation (MAYO) and a member of the Zakheni Women's Organisation, spoke about confronting death on the day of the Mamelodi massacre:

Then came the Mamelodi massacre in 1985, the 21st of November in 1985. Zakheni Women's Organisation, a civic women's organisation, was in the forefront of that. There was a march of complaining about the rates that were very expensive, paying for things that we don't know; paying for things called, uh, sundries on the receipt and when you ask, you don't get answers. So there was a very big march in Mamelodi and it end up with thirteen people dead at that massacre. There was a massacre on that day, 21st of November and then amongst the people that died there was a three-month-old baby, who died in my arms due to suffocation due to tear gas. Heh, I still have my memory. I carried the baby from the area it would be about . . . I don't know the kilometres. It could be about a ten-minute drive, ten minutes' walk from the place of the mother to the place of surgery . . . and when I was there, holding the baby, I requested the doctor to wait, check the baby, because in that surgery there were a lot of people that tear gassed, you know,

bullets and all those things, and then when I went Dr . . . he said this baby's finished and the mother was here. 'This baby's finished' 'No! No! check, check.' And he said, 'No, no, Tiny. Come, come.' And then he put me one side and said, 'The baby's finished. Please, let's proceed with those that are still alive.' And then I was wearing white tracksuit and he said, 'Please go home and put on something dark. If they have seen you, they will be able to shoot you from a distance.' And then that part always comes back, it always comes back. And that was when we were fully involved with internal politics, ja (Mokoena, interview).

The constant threat and reality of death pervaded the lives of all black women, old and young. Like their mothers, young women found ways to resist the state and, in doing so, were implicated in the all-encompassing battlefield of apartheid violence. The state, which erased the lines between the civil and the military, attacked all who opposed it. Young women at the fault lines protected the sanctity of the dead at burial sites. They also transformed these sites into redemptive spaces, for the living to keep fighting the enemy state.

Conclusion

The literature about the role of civic movements in mass mobilisation and the rise of paramilitary forces in townships is dominated by male voices and experience. The experience of the violence in homes, schools, churches and funerals ignited women into action to protect themselves, their families and their communities. The combative mothers of Poqo and Amabutho demonstrate the intersection of political tradition and maternal politics for social change. These accounts provide a tangible example of how motherhood can be a transformative tool towards intergenerational collective action among mothers and young people. They illuminate the role of women and mothers as defenders of their communities and aggressors in the political violence that ultimately forced the apartheid regime to negotiate the terms of its own ending.



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3

SANDF Integration, Demobilisation and Gender Transformation

What happens to a liberation army or guerrilla force *after* the war, if it manages to topple the old state? Does the revolutionary 'post-war' era deal with gender any differently to conventional 'post-war' eras? Is the demobilisation of women an integral part of post-war transformation? In state-building, state defending process, do women lose the status they enjoyed during the war of liberation?

— Cynthia Enloe, *Does Khaki Become You?*

In his parliamentary address on 2 February 1990, the state president, F.W. de Klerk, announced that the African National Congress (ANC), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), South African Communist Party (SACP) and other affected organisations would be unbanned, and that Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners would be released. On 7 August 1990, in a joint statement with De Klerk, Mandela announced that the ANC would 'immediately suspend its 29-year armed struggle against white-minority rule in South Africa' in order to pave the way for 'full-scale negotiations to end apartheid and write a new power-sharing constitution' (Sparks 1990).

Military negotiations leading to the formation of the new South African National Defence Force (SANDF) at midnight on 27 April 1994, and the subsequent demobilisation of non-statutory combatants who were not going to integrate into the SANDF, occurred parallel to the political negotiations capturing most of the headlines during the difficult and violent years of the negotiation period from 1990 to 1994 (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 114). Those defined as the statutory

forces included the 'SADF [South African Defence Force] and the armed forces of the nominally independent homelands of the Transkei, Bophuthatswana, Venda and Ciskei (TBVC)', while the non-statutory forces were from uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) and the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 113). As Jakkie Cilliers explains, the process of disarming, demobilising and integrating combatants into either civilian society or security institutions, such as the military or police, 'forms part of peace negotiations' as part of 'a wider peace settlement' (1995: 4).

South Africa faced the challenge of creating a united and democratic army from seven different armies (SADF, MK, APLA and TBVC armies) with distinct histories, ideologies and cultures. It was in this context that the women I interviewed had to decide whether they were going to be part of this new army, which was meant to serve all South Africans, or if they were going to choose new paths and explore the opportunities and promises of a 'new' nation. If they chose not to join the new defence force and therefore demobilise, the new government was going to facilitate their integration into civilian life. Lephophotho Mashike explains that post-war civilian 'reintegration refers to the process of facilitating the transition of former combatants to civilian life, which allows them to adapt economically and socially to productive civilian life' (2007: 3). State-assisted reintegration is 'meant to provide an enabling environment for transition to civilian life' by offering them a 'new identity that is compatible with peaceful development and sustainable growth' (Mashike 2007: 3; Farr 2003: 27).

In this chapter, I first examine the processes followed to integrate the various statutory and non-statutory forces to create the SANDF. I discuss the demobilisation process and the experiences of women who formally integrated and demobilised. I also examine the role of the women who remained in the SANDF as it transformed into a democratic defence force, and in particular its gender inclusivity. MK women who joined the SANDF used their experience in MK to initiate, strategise and implement policies that would facilitate and prioritise gender equality.

Feminists take seriously the extent to which 'the demobilisation of women [forms] an integral part of post-war transformation' because women's inclusion in state-assisted demobilisation reflects the way

in which the state and society recognise women's war contributions and their status in a post-war society (Enloe 1983: 160). Feminist literature on demobilisation shows that women face social pressure to undermine their combatant status. After the national liberation struggle in Zimbabwe, Muchaparara Musemwa argued that 'while ex-combatants generally faced problems of rehabilitation, female ex-combatants faced problems associated with conservative traditional customary belief about the social and marital position of women in Shona society' (in Lyons 2004: 223–4). According to Musemwa, many of the women ex-combatants found social reintegration into civilian life particularly difficult, as they were seen by their communities as 'too strong to be a female' and 'too independent, rough, ill-educated and unfeminine to be good wives' (in Lyons 2004: 223–4).

The experiences of the demobilisation process articulated by women combatants who formally participated in the state disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration process in South Africa reflect similar themes to those expressed by the mainly male participants in most of the literature on demobilisation (Liebenberg and Roefs 2001; Mokalobe 2001; Gear 2002; Centre for Conflict Resolution 2003; Everatt 2006, Mashike 2007; Maringira and Brankovic 2013; Heinecken and Bwalya 2013; Langa, Maringira and Merafe 2021). Core similar themes include the feeling that members of the non-statutory forces were not justly treated in the process; the requirements in terms of education levels were discriminatory; the fact that ranking was assessed by a committee dominated by members of the old SADF; and that the non-statutory forces were assimilated into a racist SADF military culture. Furthermore, like their male counterparts, the women combatants felt that the once-off payment that they received for their years in the guerrilla army was inadequate for the personal sacrifices that they had made in order to be part of MK and APLA.

Some of the women guerrillas found that the Special Pensions Act required them to be above the age of 35, not taking into consideration that many of them sacrificed their youth to end apartheid. As a direct result of this, they found themselves with few resources to start their lives in post-apartheid society. They also found the facilities that were supposed to assist them with new skills for civilian life, such as the

Service Corps, inadequate. As a result, many had to find personal means to further their education and gain new skills that would assist them in navigating new professions and new lives, bearing in mind that many of them had been out of the country for years, and some for decades.

There are, however, also significant differences between the experiences that women shared with me to those found in the male-centred studies in disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration and civilian integration research. With regard to some of these themes, it might well be that they are muted in other studies because they are issues historically associated with women and femininity, such as concerns about family. Some women combatants said that they joined the armed struggle for political ends and did not see themselves as career soldiers. Some women stated that with the end of apartheid, they looked forward to the opportunity to raise their children and be with family, while other women expressed their concern about their age and health in deciding against joining the SANDF and opting to reintegrate into civilian life. This is similar to accounts shared by members of the Ashley Kriel Detachment, most of whom chose demobilisation because 'they did not see themselves as career soldiers; serving to liberate South Africa from the shackles of white supremacist rulers was all they wanted, and this had been achieved' (Gunn and Haricharan 2019: xvii).

The integration and demobilisation process was hurried, so as to keep pace with the fast-moving political process. The establishment of the Department of Military Veterans (DMV) in 2009, and the subsequent adoption of the Military Veterans Act No. 18 of 2011, occurred at a time of increased politicisation of government departments that have been marred by factional politics of the ANC. I discuss the role of the DMV in the next chapter. Malose Langa, Godfrey Maringira and Modiefe Merafe (2021) point out that MK veterans are privileged compared to veterans of other national liberation movements. However, the dramatic rescue of Thandi Modise and Thabang Makwetla, minister and deputy of military veterans, and minister in the Presidency, Mondli Gungubele, by a Special Task Force Unit at St George's Conference Centre in Irene, Gauteng, in October 2021, after being held against their will by military veterans demanding reparations, is reflective of the desperation of military veterans who have been labelled a 'time bomb' (Mashike 2004).

The making of the SANDF

As part of the multi-party negotiating forum of 1992 and 1993, the Transitional Executive Council (TEC), which was guided by the TEC Act of September 1993, sub-councils for different state sectors were formed in order to manage and direct the manner in which these institutions would be reformed to accommodate the needs of the would-be democratic and inclusive South Africa (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 112). The Sub-Council on Defence was tasked with overseeing the 'military transition process at the political level' by planning and outlining the 'integration of all armed formations represented at the negotiations' with a view to designing a 'military for South Africa that would be affordable, effective and legitimate' (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 113). The committee responsible for handling the details of military integration was the Joint Military Co-ordinating Committee (JMCC), which consisted of representatives from all the participating armed forces, statutory and non-statutory.

As noted by Tsepe Motumi and Andrew Hudson, APLA 'only joined the negotiations towards their conclusion, shortly before the April 1994 elections, whilst the IFP [Inkatha Freedom Party] did not form part of the military negotiations, although the IFP has argued that it has a list of 6 000 persons who should be eligible for integration into the SANDF' (1995: 113). It is also worth noting that even the initial informal military negotiations that took place at the ANC 1990 Lusaka Conference only involved MK, the SADF and army officers from TBVC (Mokalobe 2001: 62).

The first step in implementing the integration of the defence force and demobilization, between 1993 and 1994, involved statutory and non-statutory forces being requested to 'submit a list of their personnel to a centralized list called the Certified Personnel Register (CPR), which was administered by the Department of Defence' (Mashike and Mokalobe 2003: 12). The new SANDF 'subsequently came into existence at midnight on 26/27 April 1994' (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 114). Members forming the new SANDF were all the personnel of the identified forces who, 'in terms of the TEC Act', had submitted a list to the CPR and thus 'automatically became members of the new force' (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 114).

As noted by Hugo van der Merwe and Guy Lamb, the ‘CPR-based SANDF integration and demobilisation process was integral in defining who constitutes South African “ex-combatants”’ (2009: 10). Among those excluded were the paramilitary formations that operated inside South African townships, such as the IFP’s self-protection units and self-defence units such as Amabutho (Gear 2002; Mashike 2007; Cherry 2011).

Motumi, who was part of the integration process and would become the first director general of the DMV, explained the way in which the CPR defined how one either integrated into the SANDF or chose to demobilise:

The CPR entitled you to two things, one of two things. Not two things, one of two things. You could integrate. It entitled you to integrate if you met the criteria. For instance, I could be on the CPR but I’m 62 years old. So, that already kicks me out from being integrated. Or I’m 65 or whatever. Or I could be on the CPR, but I’m now disabled or in ill-health . . . The other part it entitled you to was to demobilise. So, you could not do both. You either integrate or you demobilise (Motumi, interview).

There is a view held by some members of these groups that they ought to have been offered the opportunity to disarm, integrate and demobilise. As I discuss later, the Military Veterans Act No. 18 of 2011 includes some formations that were previously excluded, but largely defines veterans according to those who were integrated into the SANDF during the transition period.

Following the completion of the CPR list, the integration process followed four stages:

1. former combatants were regionally gathered and then assembled at certain military bases (that is, at Wallmansthal, Hoedspruit and De Brug);
2. they then appeared before a placement board that consisted of different armed forces and the British Military Advisory Training Team (BMATT), where those without formal military training or sufficient military qualifications did not undergo integration, and were released from the military;

3. if required, former combatants were provided with bridging training and orientation; and
4. were placed in different arms of service (Mashike and Mokalobe 2003: 13; Mokalobe 2001: 74).

According to Mafole Mokalobe, 'there were eight intakes of former MK combatants [men and women] and a few former APLA female combatants' who were received in Wallmansthal and Hoedspruit between 1994 and 1995, while 'in the De Brug Base, there were five intakes of former APLA combatants [men and women]' (2001: 74). The final mass intake was in April 1997, when 721 former combatants were integrated into Wallmansthal base. Overall, about 11 727 former MK combatants and 4 901 former APLA combatants were integrated as uniformed members of the SANDF (Mokalobe 2001: 75). It was reported that 'more than 2 000 MK and APLA soldiers who reported for integration were excluded from the SANDF because their names had not appeared on the CPR' (Mashike and Mokalobe 2003: 14). At various points, ex-combatants also left military bases to protest and there were strikes that took place in Durban and Cape Town due to disgruntlement with the integration process, which compelled President Nelson Mandela to offer a symbolic guarantee that their concerns would be addressed (Mashike and Mokalobe 2003).

General Sphiwe Nyanda, who co-chaired the JMCC, admitted that the pace of the military integration was shaped by the escalating violence and the political fragility of the 1990s, where violence was escalating despite the fact that the National Party claimed to be committed to the negotiation process and the armed struggle had ceased:

... 1993, April. Oliver Tambo dies the same month and Boipatong [massacre] has happened. There's an appeal by our leader, 'No, look, it's necessary for us to forge ahead with these negotiations' and we start working frenetically after May or so when already decisions were taken about an election on 27 April [1994] (Nyanda, interview).

The numerical breakdown of those registered in the CPR list was as follows:

Table 3.1 The content of the Certified Personnel Register

Armed force	Number
Statutory forces	
Former SADF (excluding part-time forces)	90 000
Former TBVC defence forces	11 039
<i>Subtotal</i>	101 039
Non-statutory forces	
MK	27 801
MK Non-Formal CPR	1 087
APLA Name List	6 000
<i>Subtotal</i>	34 888
TOTAL	135 927

Sources: Motumi and Hudson (1995: 114); Motumi and McKenzie (1998); Mokalobe (2001); Liebenberg and Roefs (2001); Mashike and Mokolobe (2003); Gear (2002); Van der Merwe and Lamb (2009); Heinecken and Bwalya (2013); Lamb (2013)

The BMATT was invited to assist in the integration because the British government had assisted in similar processes in other countries in the region – in Namibia and Zimbabwe (Motumi and Hudson 1995). Their main role was to assess the criteria for integration into the SANDF, to determine additional training required for integration and ‘adjudicate where necessary the ranking and placing of members of the constituent forces’ (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 118). The Demobilisation Act of 1996 also made provision to extend demobilisation to former combatants who chose not to integrate into the SANDF as a result of dissatisfaction with rank placement or because of their age, health or education.

Some of the major criticisms of the integration process relate to the state’s disregard of reports of racial tensions between members of the former SADF and those of MK and APLA. Many former combatants were resentful of the fact that it was only they who were required to undergo the Potential Tests and orientation into professional military training, most of which were administered by former SADF members,

‘who sometimes behaved with prejudice towards former MK and APLA combatants’ (Mokalobe 2001: 76). Combatants also had complaints about the ranking system itself, as some felt that many deserving combatants were placed in much lower rankings than they deserved. As a result, many of them chose demobilisation. The experiences of women described below speak to these issues in more detail.

Even the BMATT reported that during the integration process, ‘attitudes had hardened’ among SADF members towards their new MK and APLA colleagues and went on to state that these tensions may have ‘far-reaching’ implications (in Mashike and Mokalobe 2003: 15). As stated in the Introduction, one of the incidents that shone light on the gravity of difficult relationships within the new force happened on 9 September 1999, when Lieutenant Sibusiso Madubela shot dead six white SANDF members and a white civilian woman at the Tempe military base in Bloemfontein (Mashike and Mokalobe 2003: 15). Other shootings also took place at the Phalaborwa 7 SA Infantry Battalion, where a platoon commander, Lieutenant Harry Ntoagae, shot and killed his white senior colleague; and in Simon’s Town Naval Base in Cape Town, where a junior officer, Wiseman Mchunu, shot dead his white colleague (Mokalobe 2001: 79).

For Motumi and Hudson, the integration process succeeded in ‘identifying former non-statutory force members who qualify for acceptance into the SANDF and those who do not’, while it has been ‘less impressive in catering adequately for the needs of those who do not meet the requirements for entry into the military, nor has it catered in terms of demobilization, for those who are acceptable to the SANDF but refused the offer of employment made by the SANDF’ (1995: 119).

Demobilisation and reintegration

Joe Modise, the first post-apartheid Minister of Defence, announced the demobilisation process for non-statutory forces on 21 August 1995, after months of delays because of the inability of the leadership to decide on how to manage this process (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 120). The Demobilisation Act of 1996 defines demobilisation as ‘the disbanding of members of the former non-statutory forces, who do not enter into

agreements for temporary or permanent appointment with the South African Defence Force'. It further defines 'non-statutory forces' as the 'armed forces not established by any law and known or formerly known as the Azanian People's Liberation Army and uMkhonto we Sizwe'.¹

The process involved the provision of a once-off gratuity, depending on the number of years of service in MK and APLA. A total of 3 770 soldiers were formally demobilised from the SANDF (Mashike and Mokalobe 2003: 14). The gratuity was divided as follows:

Table 3.2 Gratuity for demobilised combatants

Group	Period of service	Years of service	Amount
One	1 January 1961 to 31 December 1972	22–23 years	R42 058 (US\$11 491)
Two	1 January 1973 to 31 December 1976	18–21 years	R34 313 (US\$9 375)
Three	1 January 1977 to 31 December 1982	12–17 years	R28 721 (US\$7 847)
Four	1 January 1983 to 31 December 1989	5–11 years	R20 201 (US\$5 519)
Five	1 January 1990 to 26 March 1994	0–4 years	R12 734 (US\$3 479)

Source: Motumi and Hudson (1995: 120)

Note: The amounts in US\$ reflect the exchange rate in 1995, when these figures were compiled by Motumi and Hudson.

The state announced that members who qualified for the once-off gratuity pay-out (those disqualified from integration, those who were medically unfit to join the SANDF; 'the vulnerable' and the 'veterans', who were too old to join the new defence force) also qualified to receive monthly special pensions. The Special Pensions Act of 1996, passed in terms of Section 189 of the South Africa's Interim Constitution, identifies the beneficiaries as:

1. Demobilisation Act, 27 November 1996, available from: http://www.saflii.org/za/legis/num_act/da1996154.pdf.

- a) persons who made sacrifices or who have served the public interest in establishing a democratic constitutional order, including members of any armed or military force not established by or under any law and which is under the authority and control of, or associated with and promotes the objectives of, a political organization; or
- b) dependents of such persons.²

The allocation of the special pension funds is a sensitive issue, as many applicants did not benefit from the provision.

The SANDF also offered the Service Corps to individuals who were being demobilised. They would first have to undergo eighteen months of skills training, conversion courses and career profiling (Gear 2002). The eighteen months was divided into three months of literacy training and adult life skills training, three months of vocational training, which was facilitated by the Department of Labour, and twelve months of practical experience (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 123). Very few of the thousands of demobilised combatants took the opportunity to join the Service Corps. The Corps was criticised for failing to conduct adequate research to identify the needs and aspirations of the demobilised, and instead choosing to offer a blanket approach (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 124). The state also gave participants just two weeks of personal counselling. Below, one of the participants in my research, who was part of the conceptualisation of the Service Corps programme, offers a scathing critique of what she perceives as the failure of the SANDF to design a programme that responded to the socio-economic realities of the South African political economy.

During the process of demobilisation, the SANDF 'initiated a process of downsizing or rationalization in which it sought to reduce its personnel numbers by an additional 20 000 to a total force of 70 000' (Lamb 2013: 11). In our interview, General Nyanda conceded that the vision of the military leadership was of a future defence force that 'would be respectful of the Constitution, a military that would not be involved

2. Special Pensions Act 69 of 1996, available from <https://www.gov.za/documents/special-pensions-act>.

in the politics of the country, a military – a professional military, a small military’ (Nyanda, interview). The process of rationalisation, therefore, was to achieve an idealised military force that was ‘mean and lean’. The process of rationalisation entailed voluntary retrenchment or severance packages, combined with Service Corps training.

According to Lamb, by 2006:

it was estimated that the total ex-combatant population in South Africa was 80 000 . . . however, poor record-keeping by the ANC and PAC of information on their combatants, combined with a lack of consensus over the definition of a combatant, particularly with regards to non-statutory forces, has made it impossible to verify this estimated figure (2013: 11; see also Everatt 2006).

In this regard, the politically fragile circumstances of the integration and demobilisation process, characterised by an atmosphere of mistrust between members of the statutory and non-statutory forces, did not allow for easy recording of the numbers of the combatant community. Furthermore, the exclusion of other non-statutory groups, who are still fighting for legislative recognition, does not make it possible to have an empirical and sociopolitical sense of combatants in South Africa.

The sections below focus on the experiences of the women combatants who were integrated into the SANDF: those who chose demobilisation and those who remained within the defence force and led the democratic and gender transformation of the SANDF.

Gaining CPR recognition

As noted above, the CPR list was central for individual combatants to be able to integrate into the SANDF or to apply for demobilisation. For the women I interviewed, the first step was to confirm that their names appeared on the list. Of the women who fought from outside the country, none of those from MK and APLA experienced any issues with finding their names on the list. A total of fourteen women I interviewed were officially demobilised, twelve from MK and two from APLA (Joyce Sifuba and Nomvo Booi). Of the fourteen, ten never integrated into the defence force, but instead chose demobilisation. Another four

integrated into the SANDF; three until retirement – Major General Jackie Sedibe, Colonel Belinda Martin and Brigadier Claire Bless – and one (Anonymous) resigning before retirement.

In my interviews with them, the women shed light on the dynamics of the integration process that show similarities to the views expressed in other studies, mainly with regard to education and ranking, assimilation, demobilisation benefits, Service Corps and Special Pension (Motumi and McKenzie 1998; Mokolobe 2001; Liebenberg and Roefs 2001; Mashike and Mokolobe 2003; Gear 2002; Van der Merwe and Lamb 2009; Lamb 2013).

Education and ranking: 'They didn't recognise our training'

As Motumi and Hudson note, a requirement for integration was that individuals were required to 'submit proof of educational (and or military) qualifications for eligibility as members of the SANDF' (1995: 118). Upon failure to produce the education qualifications, a person was required to undertake assessment tests designed to measure potential on a scale of 1 to 10. Only those who achieved scores of 7–10 were accepted as officers into the SANDF. For many in MK and APLA, joining the armed struggle made them sacrifice their education and this disadvantaged them in achieving status in the SANDF.

Linda Mjekula (*nom de guerre* Jessie Mlambo), a former MK combatant, said that when she returned to South Africa from Zambia in 1992, she had intended to join the SANDF. However, she did not qualify for integration into the force because she did not have Matric and also did not manage to pass the tests she was required to undergo in order to integrate (Mjekula, interview). Brenda Badela also talked about people in this situation:

There are people who left the country in 1976/1977 who were doing Standard Five [Grade Seven] or something, and they stayed in the camps for the rest of their lives. And when they came back to South Africa, they were asked for qualifications . . . There's a huge difference between a guerrilla army and a conventional army . . . I mean, there's a comrade who was our regional commander in Angola. You can imagine if you were responsible

for that region, all the camps in Angola. That person is only a brigadier general. And when I said, 'But . . . how come?', he said, 'It's how things are. What can you do?' Because you'd actually think that this person must be far, far, far senior, not a brigadier general (Badela, interview).

Major General Jackie Sedibe also spoke of how educational qualifications did not ensure that one would pass certain tests and about how the emphasis on qualifications undermined the vast and dynamic experiences of senior MK members:

There were those who had their Matric, but they failed the test, do you understand? So, to show that it wasn't really a watertight kind of an issue. So that's where there was unfairness . . . People who were elderly and who were very good in our camps as maybe commissars who could talk to people and show them that it was wrong to do certain things were now supposed to be – because they couldn't articulate themselves in a particular language – and now they should be corporals. Corporals is the lowest rank and be sent around by young people. I'm trying to show the unfairness (Sedibe, interview).

Sedibe went on to share that when she was ranked major general, making her the highest-ranked woman in the SANDF, some in the media and in rival political parties insinuated that she received the ranking because of her marriage to the Defence Minister, Joe Modise:

I had spent more than 30 years in the struggle and still then people in the media were unfairly accusing me because my husband was a minister. Swearing at me that there's nepotism. They've never come to talk to me . . . Rather than asking, 'Why did you get this rank?' I would have explained to them when I joined the liberation struggle . . . So, one time we went to parliament and then there was this DA [Democratic Alliance] guy – I forget his name – who was very vocal about me in particular that the – a wrong has been done and all that. So, he first talked to some

of our comrades who were my junior. So, when he came to me and I told him how many years I've been in MK and all that, I realised it might have been him because he then said, 'I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I didn't know that you joined the struggle as a young girl.' I said, 'I was young' (Sedibe, interview).

General Nyanda defended the emphasis on educational standards for one to qualify for integration and to determine military rank:

You see, there's no military anywhere in the world that does not recognise education in its recruitment processes . . . because the military's a highly technical institution. You can't just jump into an aircraft and fly an aircraft or think anybody can just get into an aircraft and – you need certain levels of education to do certain level of skills are required for certain levels of responsibilities in the SANDF. You can have so much – I can have so much experience in commanding in MK, but I can't say I want to be a pilot. I can't say I want to be a pilot. There are so many people who are so bright in MK, but they haven't done mathematics, they haven't done things. They can't be – you can't be traffic controllers. They can't. So, the fact of having joined MK and fought does not entitle people to be what they want anywhere in any institution in the country. It can't be (Nyanda, interview).

Belinda Martin also expressed the sense that members of MK and APLA were undermined and ranked lower than members of the SADF:

I integrated, they ranked me a major, although I deserved more than that. All of us were given very poor ranks, from MK and APLA. They didn't recognise our training that we had. Even medical doctors who trained abroad from MK were not – they didn't want to recognise our education . . . Because the seven armies merging wasn't easy and in the military house, we had all the medical professions, professionals from the SADF, MK and APLA and they wanted to tower above the non-statutory forces, that was MK and APLA, and undermine the qualifications of

our doctors, our nurses and everybody, and rank them poorly (Martin, interview).

Another combatant complained that she was given a lower rank because of her age:

I was ranked, I ended up being ranked as a major but the rank that MK had put forward was that of lieutenant-colonel. But my age was – I was in my twenties and I just invoked the Constitution to say discrimination on the basis of age . . . As a way of just rattling the thing because I didn't have any interest in the long term . . . For me it was *a luta continua* [the struggle continues] and contesting everything even throughout the integration process (Anonymous, interview).

Tiny Tatelo Mokoena, the only member of a self-defence unit who integrated to the SANDF, argued that the ranking system was used as a form of assimilating members of the non-statutory forces:

There was nothing like integration, honestly. It was just assimilation. Or, it was assimilation, or . . . because I integrated with a degree already . . . but at the same time for the Defence Force to agree to make me an officer was a hassle. And then, I was lucky I had a very good person who was representing me. They wanted to make me a lieutenant. And he said you can't. I want her as a major. But they said MK doesn't have an airforce. MK was an armed struggle – conventional organisation. So, you are taking her a step downwards. That's when I became a captain. I integrated with the rank of a captain. Firstly, we were not educated as far as the rank system is concerned. We were not told whether we were comfortable with the rank system or whether we are comfortable with the process of integration. And the worst part is that MK put a lieutenant-colonel for integration, which to me says that the government of that time didn't take issues of defence seriously, because if they did they wouldn't put lieutenant-colonel as a low rank for someone to

represent people. They were supposed to put a very high senior rank – a major general – to represent people, who would be able to fight for bigger and better ranks. And most of the TBVC states were promoted prior to integration. Immediately that they heard there's integration, they fast-tracked their promotions. So when we came, most of us were given very, very low ranks . . . So you needed a person from us to say, 'If you don't have someone from your rank, from your organisation, they will give you any rank whether you agreed to it or not'. And they will give a lot of funny reasons that you are not at this age. I was told you can't be a major because I was not even . . . I was not 30 and then all to find I was not 35 or something – I don't remember the age they put. But after integration, I realised there were white majors of lower age than me, you see? So they were not systematic as far as that is concerned and they were not . . . there was no fairness in ensuring that they put the right people in the right ranks (Mokoena, interview).

For many combatants, the milieu of the ranking system was one that set hierarchies for the culture that they were to expect in the SANDF. For them, the explicit tone was that their guerrilla experience was regarded as inferior, even though as part of the 'people's army', they saw themselves as the victors of the war that had been fought. The process undermined, and in the words of some participants, 'humiliated' guerrilla combatants in what they saw as the entrenchment of the white supremacist culture of the SADF into the SANDF. The ranking and the education requirements of the process influenced the decision of many combatants in deciding to be demobilised. The theme of assimilation speaks to perceptions by the combatants of a dominant Afrikaner culture of the SADF that was resistant to the new conditions of a post-apartheid South Africa. With fears of suffocating under this culture, some women combatants instead chose demobilisation.

Assimilation: 'We humiliated our veterans'

A key theme that arises about the challenges of the integration process is the theme of assimilation (Motumi and McKenzie 1998; Mokalobe

2001; Liebenberg and Roefs 2001; Mashike and Mokalobe 2003; Gear 2002; Van der Merwe and Lamb 2009; Lamb 2013). As a result of the perceived dominance of the SADF and dissatisfaction with regard to the ranking system, which they saw as undermining the skills of the non-statutory forces, many combatants opted for demobilisation, to escape entry into a new defence force that was still dominated by the old Afrikaner SADF ethos.

For the women I interviewed who participated in this process, assimilation was a major factor shaping their dissatisfaction with the integration process and their decision to demobilise. A former MK combatant, who preferred to be anonymous, pointed to various causes of tension – from the use of Afrikaans, the use of the old SADF uniform and the ranking system, as multiple causes of the problems that came with assimilated integration:

I think we humiliated our veterans, our senior people, by putting them on the same par as me, you know. To operate, to enter the system and try to and make a living . . . My view would have been to treat them differently . . . because they are in that situation, the main core of the Defence Force at the administrative level remained the old correspondence – in Afrikaans. Any correspondence that comes to me in Afrikaans, I don't read it. I don't care if it's an instruction. And all my correspondences would be in English because my argument is that if you create a new system, you all have to learn the new system. So, there will be things that we know; there will be things that we don't know. Why does it apply only to non-statutory forces? Because issues of language, issues of uniform, issues of culture in the Defence Force and stuff like that . . . which basically resulted into in the long term, in my view, in us being assimilated into the thing (Anonymous, interview).

Of the uniform, she said: 'I refused to wear the uniform . . . I said, we integrated, so I'm not wearing the SADF uniform. We need a new uniform that can reflect both. So, I left. Throughout my life in the Defence Force, I never wore [the] uniform.'

Brigadier Claire Bless, a white MK combatant who integrated into the SANDF, spoke about how members of the old SADF addressed her in Afrikaans – which she refused to speak and was not able to speak – while she sat next to her black comrades. She just kept saying that integration was a difficult process. For others, such as Pumza Dyantyi, the integration and demobilisation processes were very difficult because this meant that they came face to face with their former enemies, the Boers:

Truth be told, my child, I found the process very difficult for me having to work with the Boers. For grading, when we were being interviewed, they were assessing our grade and I was graded a sergeant, and I was Grade A. I am a colonel. I did just a part time at the Mthatha base and I felt that I was not ready to work with these people. I decided that it is better that I go for demob (Dyantyi, interview).

For Pamela Daniels, entering the SANDF implied that the open spirit of engagement that she experienced while in MK was going to disappear under the different forms of engagement in the new army, where soldiering was rigidly defined and was not open to the institutional culture being challenged:

When I came back, of course, I was planning – because there were not much options – I was planning to go to the Defence. Fortunately, or unfortunately, at the point when I wanted to integrate, there was a scene in Wallmansdal, where soldiers were fighting and looking at the situation and, seeing how the process was unfolding. I felt – because I'm one person who speaks my mind; in the middle of Angola, I would speak my mind and, as you know, there's command and control in the Defence; you cannot just say or do whatever you want. But fortunately, we were taught that you respect leadership. You do not fear leadership and therefore, as political soldiers we had room to be able to air our views. Not like in any other army, where you are subjected to command and it ends there. So that's the difference. So, I felt . . . I would not survive in the Defence, one; and of course

what I've stated – the way, the process unfolded, based on the fact that we had this whole negotiated settlement and all that. So, I felt, once I saw what was happening in Wallmansthal, I decided to take . . . the money, not knowing what I was going to do, I was going to go. I demobilised in 1996 (Daniels, interview).

General Nyanda admitted that a key compromise during integration was that the apartheid civil service was going to be absorbed by the new democratic government and said, 'the political situation was such that you can't interfere with those people in the SANDF' (Nyanda, interview). Therefore, if the SANDF was perceived as 'fat', instead of 'mean and lean', as Nyanda described it, it was the members of MK and APLA who were faced with high and unreasonable standards of integration that prevented some from integrating, or the conditions were made so unbearable in the army that many considered demobilisation as the only option.

Demobilisation payment: 'Not worth what I went through'

Two MK women I interviewed briefly integrated into the SANDF and then demobilised in 1996 and 1998, respectively. Twelve of the participants received the demobilisation amount of R20 201 (US\$5 519) for group four, which is meant for those who served for five to eleven years from 1 January 1983 to 31 December 1989 (Motumi and Hudson 1995: 120). One participant, APLA's Joyce Sifuba, received R42 058 (US\$11 491), which is the amount that was awarded to those who served between 22 and 23 years, from 1 January 1961 to 31 December 1972.

It was not a surprise that many of the women who qualified to receive the once-off demobilisation payment felt that it was an inadequate amount of compensation for the sacrifices they had made. The money was considered particularly insufficient for people who were starting their lives anew, often with enormous expectations from families, who also needed their financial support:

I received the demobilisation [pay-out] . . . but you should realise what I received was not worth what I went through. The disadvantage being the recognition of all the years that I spent,

the training that I went through, and what I went through. Now R21 000, really, I mean, I didn't enjoy my youth. I went through what I went through. We were living under conditions that were not safe. From time to time we were attacked; from time to time we had to run away, to go to alternative bases, because the Boers might attack (Daniels, interview).

Nomfundiso Kulati talked about the demands of having children and also the expectations of financial support for one's extended family, in relation to compensation:

With family, things are kind of fine, although they have great expectations because, one – you have sacrificed your life at a young age and at times, they look up to you to improve their socio-economic situations. Remember, because we as Africans have all these, you know, extended family, and you can't provide . . . I had no money. I had a child. I did not integrate. Okay, I decide to take a minimum amount of a demobilisation fund, which was 20 000, which ended within few days, few months or so (Kulati, interview).

Major General Sedibe, who would have been one of the few women like Joyce Sifuba to qualify to receive R42 058 (US\$11 491), expressed that the amount shaped her decision to choose to remain in the defence force. She said:

It was nothing, nothing and I looked at my situation and I said, look, I have two young kids who still have to go to school. I must pay for their schooling. I must find them housing and all that. If I take the R50 000, how long will it last me? It won't even be three months (Sedibe, interview).

The once-off payments that demobilised combatants were given to assist them navigate the socio-economic transition to civilian life did not consider the multiple financial needs that many of the women and men were to face as they made multiple transitions: from guerrilla to civilian, and from life in exile to life at home.

Health and age

By the 1990s, at the time of integration, some combatants were already in their forties and fifties because they had been active since the 1960s and 1970s. Two such combatants, who had been active in the 1960s and 1970s in APLA and MK, felt that their health and age compromised their ability to integrate into the SANDF.

Joyce Sifuba, who had been active in APLA, explained that after being away since 1964, she and her husband, who was also a combatant, wanted to adapt quietly back into life in South Africa after their arrival in Johannesburg. They both felt that they were too old to join the defence force. They also wanted to live in a place that would allow for an easy transition to South Africa for their children, who were born in exile:

We did not stay for long in Gauteng. We went to register in our office and then came to Mpumalanga. We came to Mpumalanga to find a place to live. We came to Mpumalanga because we came with children who do not know South Africa. So, we felt if we, my husband said, if we go and live in Johannesburg, they will be swallowed by the volumes of Johannesburg. Let's look for a place outside and then they can gradually go in and adapt the way of living in South Africa because Johannesburg was too fast. And my husband comes from Cape Town and he also thought that Cape Town is too fast. Let's look for a remote place that's quiet until they settle down (Sifuba, interview).

Phumla Mgaba, who was born in 1948 in New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, was a schoolteacher before she left the country to join MK in 1978, at the age of 30. Upon returning to South Africa, she worked for the ANC office as one of the officers responsible for repatriating people back home. She said that when the repatriation was over, she realised that she did not want to integrate into the SANDF because she was not well physically, as she suffered from arthritis (Mgaba, interview).

Not a career soldier: 'I just wanted to be independent'

For many who gave their lives to the cause of liberation, both inside and outside South Africa, the unbanning of the liberation movements and

the eventual transition to democratic rule threw up new questions about the kinds of professional lives that they could take on, now that the battle was won. Those in MK, like others within the different movements, had to ask themselves if they would continue as professional soldiers or take a different path now that the armed struggle was over. While material considerations were part of the decision to integrate or demobilise, some of the women I talked to made it clear that they had not become soldiers as a career goal. Therefore, after the end of apartheid, they did not see themselves becoming career soldiers. When I asked Makhosazana Xaba, who is now an acclaimed writer of poetry, fiction and essays, whether she had considered integrating into the SANDF, her response was:

No, I didn't want to. I really didn't like the idea. When I was in the camp, I knew what I was there for. I had wanted to be there; I understand why I needed to be there. So that I could come back and fight. But I didn't want that as a profession. I couldn't visualise myself as a 50-year-old who is in the SANDF. That's not where I wanted to be (Xaba, interview).

Totsie Memela, who was the CEO of Eduloan at the time of the interview and is currently the CEO of the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA), articulated that after attaining a Master's degree in Management and becoming interested in the financial industry, she decided that she 'could contribute in the Defence Force without necessarily being a soldier' (Memela, interview). She did not elaborate on the ways in which she has been able to make this contribution outside of the SANDF. Nomsa Ngcipe explained that she demobilised because she wanted to be independent and not indebted to a political party or government:

I decided that I did not want to go back to the military when I got back home because I was still . . . I just wanted to be independent, completely independent and not feel responsibility to government and so I demobilised. There was a demobilisation process, so I became one of the people that demobilised (Ngcipe, interview).

Debby Bonnin (2000) argues that surviving and resisting apartheid terror meant that the lives of most people were suspended and, for the guerrilla combatants, there was little space for them to conceive of professional lives outside of the war that they were fighting. The end of apartheid opened a space for them to imagine a new future beyond a life of mere survival and resistance. Thus, it is not surprising that some women opted for demobilisation to give themselves a space to make concrete the rewards of freedom.

Family: 'We've been away for a long time'

Some women chose against integration into the SANDF because, after years of separation from their families, they wished to rebuild their family lives. Nombulelo April lost two of her children in 1994 and 1998; they both suffered from physical injuries at the hands of the police who were searching for their mother during the apartheid years. She shared that she looked forward to a time of being with her children (April, interview). Phumla Mgaba expressed a similar yearning for a family life after years of separation: 'We've been away for a long time and you have that feeling that it has been a long time since you were home. I studied primary, secondary, boarding school and then I worked in Transkei and . . . so there is that feeling I want to be at home (Mgaba, interview). Nomfundiso Kulati, who returned to South Africa in 1994 after completing a broadcasting diploma in Zimbabwe, decided that she would not integrate into the SANDF in order to be able to look after her young son:

So, I came with my son, tried to re-establish myself using the qualifications that I had. I didn't want to integrate and be part of the National Defence Force, not because I didn't have passion, but because I had this child, and when I looked at my boy, I was asking myself, 'Who would best take care of him?' So, I just wanted more to be a civilian. And I was lucky to get a job as a public relations officer (Kulati, interview).

The theme of family is muted in other studies about integration and demobilisation. It may well be that, in those studies, the male

combatants were not asked if family considerations affected their decision to demobilise. Even though I did not explicitly ask the women I interviewed whether family affected their decision not to integrate, it is unsurprising that women combatants felt more comfortable articulating the importance of family in their decision-making, as women are socially expected to prioritise family, even when considering their professional development. In the same vein, it may be that certain male combatants felt that it was not 'manly' to discuss family as a factor in their decisions. Thus, prevailing understandings of femininity and masculinity shape, as in all research, what participants reveal about their motivations in making decisions.

The Service Corps

The Service Corps was the main instrument used by the state to offer short-term training in new skills that demobilised combatants would require for their post-military lives.

Of the women I interviewed, only one participated in the eighteen months of training offered by the Service Corps. Linda Mjekula focused on farming as a skill and was a full-time subsistence farmer until she passed away in February 2021.

For the other women who officially demobilised, the Service Corps was not even mentioned in our conversations. One of the participants, who preferred to be anonymous, participated in the design of the Service Corps programme and offered an insider critique that is important to cite in some detail, as it corroborates the weaknesses that scholars Motumi and Hudson (1995) and Gear (2002) highlight. She pointed out that the SANDF had not chosen skills training relevant to the combatants, but rather followed templates that had been used in other countries. Insightfully, her argument was that because of a desire to maintain certain control, the SANDF was not able to let go of the programme and in the Service Corps, the ex-combatants behaved like soldiers, even though the purpose of the programme was to prepare them for civilian life:

You see, the concept and the initial research . . . because the difficulty that you had is that you had to work with what you had. The audit of what skills people have was done. The ask

[requirements] of the South African economy, opportunities that were available around that particular time, was done . . . the whole proposal was based on that. But there were certain things that were part of that particular process that we had raised that were constraining what could be an effective programme because the bigger issue was that our view was that you can't do these things . . . My argument was that you can't prepare people for civilian life and then want them to continue to live as soldiers. First thing they do in the morning is to do is drill . . . the issue that we kept on raising as a constraint, and that was the source of the problem, was that these people – we are preparing them for civilian life – but we want to continue to treat them and to a point sometimes humiliate them in the soldiering environment. That they would have to wake up and drill and do all the things that, you know, for me, the first three hours they are awake, they are soldiers (Anonymous, interview).

She argued that the limited preparation given to soon-to-be civilians in a military environment was a crucial weakness of the purpose of the Service Corps:

The argument was that the environment was not conducive, is not enabling them to think outside of the military. So, when they finish these sessions for three to four hours, they go back, and are held to the same rules as they do, and to actually say, 'What does discipline mean when you're a civilian? What are the things that we need to carry that we've learned as a disciplined soldier, that you need to carry as a citizen?' . . . These were the issues that we were grappling with and we were saying, 'This thing can't be effectively done in a military set-up'. You see? You probably needed a different environment. It could still be owned by the Defence Force, but they can't be living as soldiers. If it's a question of releasing people to go to their families, and come to that particular process, they are still under the ambit of the Defence Force, but they are living a normal life. They are not staying in a camp and doing the drills, you know (Anonymous, interview).

She also pointed to the fact that the people who were running the programme were themselves soldiers and that this was another limitation of the programme:

The second thing we're saying, the big components of the people running the Service Corps are soldiers, you know? They don't fully appreciate the nuances of the life that, you know, ordinary citizens who are non-soldiers that we are preparing these people for. So those were – and those things were never answered. These were the things that were rejected and the thing was primarily run by soldiers who were primarily white and the people were preparing were primarily black (Anonymous, interview).

The formal demobilisation process, which for some began with a brief integration into the SANDF, was a hostile and undermining experience for many combatants, who felt that their guerrilla experience was being discarded in favour of the white Afrikaner culture of the old SADF. The fear of being assimilated into this culture influenced the decisions of some women to opt for demobilisation.

The end of apartheid opened up opportunities for some women to reimagine their lives and to form new personal and professional identities outside the guerrilla identities that had shaped their lives to that point. While for some, age, compromised health and the desire to be with their children informed their decision not to integrate, the once-off demobilisation payment and the Service Corps were inadequate to support former combatants in building new socio-economic identities. Thus, in the main, the former combatants were obliged to transition into civilian life on their own. For those who could not participate in the formal demobilisation process, the special pension was the only way that they were able to obtain financial support to build their lives, following the sacrifices they made for the anti-apartheid struggle. While the pension was meant to assist the broad range of individuals who participated in the people's war, formally trained transnational combatants were more likely to receive this form of state support than combatants who were inside the country. I discuss this in the next chapter.

‘Until my policies bite you’: Leading gender transformation in the SANDF

In 2019, Major Mandisa Mfeka became South Africa’s first black woman combat pilot in the South African Air Force (Bhengu 2019). Her achievements have been celebrated as another marker that women can thrive in all spaces of the SANDF, including combat. Major Mfeka has become the face of the Volkswagen’s T-Roc, as an example of the ‘one who dares to take up space’ (Volkswagen 2020). The invitation for women to ‘take up space’ was the call to action by former Miss South Africa and Miss Universe, Zozibini Tunzi, to whom Major Mfeka holds a striking resemblance.

The MK women who integrated into the SANDF led the democratic and gender transformation of the army. South Africa today is lauded as having some of the highest numbers of women in defence and peacekeeping operations. This has been achieved through the policies, vision and implementation of the women who trained as soldiers in a guerrilla army where the equipment, including uniforms, were designed for men. Below, I highlight the roles of Major General Jackie Sedibe, Thandi Modise and Major General Ntsiki Memela-Motumi in the gender transformation of the SANDF.

Major General Sedibe recalls that some members of the SANDF did not want to acknowledge her senior position. Having been appointed in the Equal Opportunities portfolio, she was responsible for drafting policies that would ensure equity:

I’ve also heard a lot of problems with white people when I was there because they had never seen a woman general. To them, it was just rubbish. Some didn’t salute me, you know, because when you meet a senior general you must salute. I didn’t care and I said, ‘Until my policies bite you . . .’. I was given the portfolio of Equal Opportunities, a department that was never there before. I have never generated policies as I did because it was a new – but I felt that I was doing something that is going to benefit the defence force, that is going to bring in equity and fairness in the defence force. So we worked day and night and I’m quite happy that I was involved in that . . . Because that – when

I – people were fighting about me and in some interviews I said, ‘Yes, I am the first [female] general but I’m not going to be the last’ and when I retired there were more than fifteen generals, women generals (Sedibe, interview).

Thandi Modise spoke about how she used her role as the first chair of the Joint Standing Committee of Defence in Parliament to facilitate gender equality in the SANDF:

It’s important to look at the Joint Standing Committee of Defence in South Africa because it’s the – it’s one of the most important committees since it has this constitutional mandate. It has the right to basically interfere in anything military because it is enabled, it is empowered to put questions on the functioning of the national defence force, on the morale of the national defence force, on the budget of the national defence force. And this is the vehicle we then used in 1994 to say, ‘Okay, we’re not happy about representation’ and coming from uMkhonto we Sizwe, it was important for women in the ANC benches to say, ‘*Hayibo*, why would you say to us that women cannot be in infantry? Why would you say to us they cannot fly planes and they can – they can’t be in the boats?’ So, in fact, the first gender conference of the defence force was led by us. We had this important role to play. Firstly, open up for women and open up for women we did. If the matters have regressed, then I regret (Modise, interview).

Major General Ntsiki Memela-Motumi, who became the chief director of Transformation Management in the SANDF, emphasised the role of women from non-statutory forces in changing the policy that women were not allowed in combat:

The first challenge, which was also noticed before the actual integration, was the fact that, I mean, policy at the time stipulated that women were not supposed to serve in the combat corps. So, it became important that this issue was addressed and again, during the negotiations, a subgroup headed by my predecessor,

General Jackie Sedibe, then looked into, you know, what type of policies needed to be put in place in order to ensure that women were found everywhere. This was, of course, motivated by the fact that those who came from non-statutory forces were already used to serving with women in the trenches. So, we needed to bring that into this new SANDF. So, it was now a question of ensuring that, you know, with the new policy, women were then allowed to serve wherever they chose to (Memela-Motumi, interview).

Modise explained why they ensured that the uniforms of the SANDF were gender friendly:

One of the things we went for was to look at how the women's uniform was tailored. People thought, 'Oh no, but that is unnecessary'. Now, that was very important because if that shoe is not comfortable, that woman is not going to be able to take it. That woman is not going to stand, is not going to run, is going to be declared unfit. So, it was our business as women, having worn military shoes designed for men, it was necessary for us to say, 'No, this one is not right'. It was necessary for us to even say, 'This pair of pants does not suit this woman. She can't run in this one. She's not at ease' and therefore call for redesigns even of those things (Modise, interview).

She further clarified why the military equipment of the defence force also had to be gender friendly:

It was necessary for us when South Africa was going into the acquisition programme to say, 'And because we want women to be pilots, we want you to give us the specifications around the dress'. Because, finally, when we really were hitting it and wanting to understand why certain heights and weights were only applicable if anybody wanted to be a pilot, it all came down to the specifics of the chairs and the whatever. We insisted that for the South African National Defence Force to be truly representative, recruitment of young women needed to be upped.

Precisely because we are looking at an instance where someday women will run the national defence force (Modise, interview).

Major General Memela-Motumi explained that gender-friendly equipment had been successfully procured: 'The new ships that have been bought are gender friendly and in terms of the aircrafts, the chief of the air force has undertaken a project, you know, that addresses the ejection seat because it doesn't accommodate lightweight women' (Memela-Motumi, interview). She said that a key challenge of the SANDF was the creation of a new, democratic, just and fair culture:

Other than changing policy to accommodate women to serve in combat, I mean, one of the key areas where, you know, the whole question of civic education, structural transformation, demographics, question of processes, diversity management, you know, military culture. What will then be the new military culture because you have now all these different groupings coming together into one? So those were really the essence of the transformation agenda and again, leadership. You know, what type of leadership do we require for this new era? So that was, in essence, what the transformation agenda was all about (Memela-Motumi, interview).

She explained that the success of democratic and gender transformation ultimately relies on the political will of leaders in the SANDF.

When I see the Volkswagen advert of Major Mfeka 'taking up space' as a combat pilot, I think of the hard and sustained policy and practical labour of women such as Major Generals Sedibe, Memela-Motumi and Modise. As they point out, their experiences as guerrillas shaped their vision and leadership of a transformed and equitable defence force.

Conclusion

This chapter offers an insight into the lives of women combatants immediately after the end of the armed struggle and through the integration and demobilisation processes. Transnationally trained guerrillas did not struggle to receive official certification to integrate into

the new defence force, but most of the women I interviewed chose to demobilise.

As mentioned previously, there is very little in the existing literature on demobilisation of women in particular and this chapter aims to fill that gap by providing a detailed account of MK and APLA women's experiences of the state-led process. It should also be clear from this chapter that women from liberation movements who integrated into the SANDF used their experience as female combatants to play a crucial leadership role in crafting policies that facilitate gender equality and equity.

4

From *Ukuzabalaza* to *Ukutabalaza* *Life after Apartheid*

After the bodies had been identified, counted and taken away
After the police had come and gone, the neighbours stuck around
Four women walked the familiar path in a single file, paraffin lamps in
their hands
The stars listened to their now hushed cries, watched them wipe away
silent tears
Mechanically they filled their water buckets from the homestead tank
Back at home, rags and soap from the cupboards they started cleaning:
first, sweeping shards of glass scattered in every room, then, wiping
splashes of blood on walls and broken windows, smeared across the
furniture, doors, sometimes even spotting the ceiling.
In the kitchen, they removed pieces of brain tissue splattered in all
directions
When they went on their knees to clean the floors
cupping congealed blood in their hands – they told the girls to look
away
instructed them to comfort younger children, sing them lullabies until
they sleep.
They put in a bowl all the cartridges and bullets they found.
In the bedrooms, they stripped the blood-stained bedcovers and
curtains
soaked everything in large zinc tubs for washing the next day.
They went into each room, repositioned everything
until the homestead looked almost exactly as it did before the massacre.
By sunrise the women had restored the homestead.

But images of bodies that were identified, counted and taken away
 Linger, years later, in the women's hearts and heads
 In their hands they still see blood, broken glasses and brain tissue.
 — Makhosazana Xaba, 'After the Massacre'

This chapter focuses on women ex-combatants' socio-economic and psychological integration into post-apartheid South Africa. I argue that transnationally trained guerrillas and combative mothers transitioned from a life of political struggle to an everyday life of hustling for survival in democratic South Africa. The distinction I make between *ukuzabalaza* (to struggle) and *ukutabalaza* (to hustle) is that the anti-apartheid struggle was for the recognition of the citizenship of black South Africans, which was codified in the Constitution in 1996. The achievement of legal equality gives individual citizens the illusion that they can realise the promises of a 'good life'. Until this research on women and the armed struggle, I did not fully appreciate the impacts of the Group Areas Act on black people who lived under apartheid. For many of the women I interviewed, simply having the right to be and live anywhere in the country was an important achievement, as apartheid confined physical, political, economic and social mobility. Pumla Dineo Gqola explains: 'Apartheid legislation was unabashedly fixated on the regulation of bodies, with limiting movement, legalizing bodily contact, with measuring hair texture, with the regulation of labour, sexuality, and reproduction, on the punishment of the body through beatings, shootings, and poverty' (2016: 120). While one can say that black people are still confined in apartheid-defined geographical spaces, such as the townships, legal equality means that a black person who has the economic means can leave the township and live elsewhere. The achievement of political equality through political struggle – *umzabalazo* – has 'freed' black South Africans to craft socio-economic strategies that allow them to realise substantive equality in ways that align with their definitions of success. South Africa is labelled the 'protest capital of the world', meaning that political struggle continues after apartheid. But it is constitutionally protected, unlike during apartheid when it was the 'thing that could not pass through one's lips', as one woman from Poqo put it.

Gqola describes the trope of the ‘New South African woman’, who signals ‘a departure from hegemonic apartheid femininities and an attempt to imagine the kind of agentic existence women might aspire to in a free country’ (2016: 120), who combines women’s new-found political equality with corporatised ideas of women’s economic empowerment that represent desirable, elite, heterosexual womanhood in democratic South Africa. This woman can be seen in the covers of popular South African beauty and lifestyle women’s magazines such as *True Love* and *Destiny*. Ndapwa Alweendo and Simidele Dosekun write about the ‘Luminance woman’, named after the ‘ultra-exclusive’ Luminance boutique in Hyde Park, Johannesburg, formerly owned by Khanyi Dhlomo, a businesswoman and former editor of *True Love* and founder of *Destiny* magazine (2019: 127). They argue that ‘Luminance represents the arrival for black South African women more specifically an arrival at consumerist and seemingly carefree self-making via what is branded the finest in global luxury’ (2019: 128). This is what is termed the ‘soft life’ in popular culture.

This ‘New South African woman’ (Gqola 2016) sits side by side with what Gcobani Qambela describes as the ‘New South African Man’ (2021: 54). Athambile Masola describes this man as heterosexual, ‘educated, middle-class, well-spoken, articulate, good-looking, wealthy or climbing the white slopes of success in the hallowed halls of corporate industry . . . [and] often has a beautiful woman at his side confirming his success’ (cited in Qambela 2021: 54). For both the ‘New’ woman and man, success in democratic South Africa is individualised and relies on constant displays of luxury consumption. As Alweendo and Dosekun point out, ‘luxury consumption does not add up to radical or transformative politics, and neither do the neoliberal visions and constructs of empowerment – black economic empowerment and women’s empowerment – that have dominated official discourse and development programming in the country since 1994’ (2019: 136).

This ‘highly corporatized and monetized figure’ of a new South African woman remains elusive to the majority of South African women, including those who were combatants (Gqola 2016: 120). While a number of women who were in uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) occupy ministerial, ambassadorial and directorship positions in government and

some are CEOs in business, the majority of the women ex-combatants are surviving in democratic South Africa through a combination of limited state support (through social grants) and piecing together economic livelihoods in the informal economy, which relies on women's cheapened labour and resources in a neo-liberal political economy – in other words, *ukutabalaza*.

Nthabiseng Motsemme (2011) describes the post-apartheid context, where many township women's children have been casualties to the HIV and AIDS pandemic and their children and grandchildren are poor. Motsemme says that township mothers and daughters 'lived and embodied survival wisdom' (2011: 11) and have had to find ways to hustle – '*ukuphanta*' (used interchangeably in isiXhosa as '*ukutabalaza*' and '*ukuphanda*') as a means of 'finding a way in order to survive', 'getting by' and 'making ends meet' (2011: 104). She argues that '*ukuphanta*' is 'a social concept that can be found in several communities, particularly the working class, throughout the world' (2011: 104). The process of 'hustling' 'involves a set of skills, a way of doing something to create opportunities for income to achieve often provisional results, such as acquiring groceries, school fees, clothing, toiletries, beauty products, fast-food, entertainment, cover transport costs, airtime and other everyday household necessities' (2011: 106). In his book *The Art of Hustling: Sell or Surrender*, Sbusiso Leope, better known as 'DJ Sbu', also defines a hustler as 'someone who gets things done. Someone who makes sure that not a single one of their people goes to bed hungry . . . hustlers turn negatives into positives' (2018: 15).

I particularly like the links that Motsemme makes between *ukuphanta* and *ukuhlonipha* (respect) – concepts that are often seen as opposites. She explains:

'Ukuhlonipha' as a lived and embodied spiritual/religious sensibility is also born out of the African's need to survive the tensions of oppressive systems such as colonialism and apartheid, while also maintaining a more humane understanding of their place in the world . . . 'ukuhlonipha', similarly to 'ukuphanta', is about creating spaces of freedom, but in this case with a special emphasis on a connection with the divine' (2011: 111–12).

DJ Sbu credits hip-hop culture with removing the ‘negative connotations’ of hustling ‘with being a little aggressive or maybe even shady’ (Leope 2018: 15).

When my mother says, ‘*ndizotabalaza, ntombi* (I am going to hustle, my girl)’, she means that she is going to make something out of nothing. Londiwe N. Mntambo makes it clear that ‘the burden of *ukwenza izinto zenzeke* (finding a means to survive) has been that of women’ (2021: 121). The majority of women ex-combatants, like most women in South Africa, have transitioned from a life of struggle to a preoccupation with piecing together their lives and those of their extended families at a great physical and psychological cost.

Below, I first look at women’s access to the special pension grant that is theoretically available to all those who can prove that they fought in the mass democratic structures of the national liberation struggle, including former combatants. This special grant has been the major way in which women who did not receive formal guerrilla training have attempted to gain state support for their role in national liberation. I then look at women ex-combatants’ access to the benefits offered to military veterans by the Department of Military Veterans (DMV). Finally, I examine women’s integration within their families, their political involvement after 1994, and the trauma and psychological legacies of having participated in the armed struggle.

Special pension: ‘There are a lot of problems with the special pension’

It was clear from the women I interviewed that levels of education made the biggest impact on their socio-economic well-being. The women who had tertiary education have had more job security than those with only high school, or no education. Among the employed are a former member of parliament, a CEO, a former minister of health in the Eastern Cape, a teacher, civil servants, domestic workers, and those who own their businesses and work in the private sector. About sixteen were at pensionable age, with three having retired from the South African National Defence Force (SANDF). Most of the women, employed or not, are the breadwinners of their families. Most of them are responsible for their immediate and extended family. The majority who are receiving

old-age pensions and support unemployed children and grandchildren have to find various ways of making ends meet.

As noted in Chapter 3, the Special Pensions Act of 1996 identifies beneficiaries as:

- a) persons who made sacrifices or who have served the public interest in establishing a democratic constitutional order, including members of any armed or military force not established by or under any law and which is under the authority and control of, or associated with and promotes the objectives of, a political organization; or
- b) dependents of such persons.¹

The provision of the special pension has been the main form of state financial support for women who fought inside the country alongside the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA), MK, and the self-defence units, such as Amabutho.

Although the special pension was also an issue for the women who were officially demobilised, it came up more strongly among the APLA and Amabutho women in Mqanduli and Gqeberha (formerly Port Elizabeth). They detailed their various attempts to receive the pension and the struggles of dependents, who have since tried to apply for parents who have died. Accounts of experiences of APLA women in Mqanduli show that the process of applying for a special pension is a frustrating bureaucratic procedure, which has not offered relief for many of those who have applied. For younger women, the fact that the Act requires applicants to be 35 years old and older does not reflect the reality that many young people sacrificed their youth towards the ends of freedom. Thus, for those who could not participate in the formal demobilisation process, the provision of the special pension has offered little financial compensation. In the main, women have had no support towards building civilian livelihoods in post-apartheid South Africa. Of all the women I interviewed, only seven receive the special pension every month. Five are MK members and two are from APLA – all seven

1. Special Pensions Act 69 of 1996, available from <https://www.gov.za/documents/special-pensions-act>.

women are transnational combatants. Nkosazana Sobantu commented on the significance of age:

Amabutho worked a lot in terms of putting force into the government. They were disrupting, burning cars, all the buildings of the government, because anything that had come through the system was an enemy to us. So, they played that role and the people using them were adults and the police did not understand how children could do this . . . Children were participating in the struggle and now they are not able to receive the special pension because they were still too young. There is an Act that says they are too young, that they were not 35 during 1996, and because of that, some of them are not able to receive the pension. We are fighting against that because they are the ones who fought, but today they are not recognised. They are not being given the privilege that others are given (Sobantu, interview).

This age criterion also affected those, like Nomfundiso Kulati, who were formally demobilised. Demobilised combatants were allowed to receive demobilisation benefits and apply for the special pension, but Kulati could also not apply because of her age:

It was around '97, I think '97/98. Because I was young, joined the struggle at a young age. I also – there's this issue of special pensions. Many people were benefiting through that Act. The Act has disadvantaged me because of my age – they were saying I was too young then. The Act wanted people who were 35 years old when the Act was passed in 1996 and I was younger than 35, so I don't qualify. Now that I have children and both of their fathers are no more, the Act does not even take into account the fact that I have two kids I must raise all by myself (Kulati, interview).

Ma-Mabhengeza stated that with the help of members of Amabutho, she had applied for the special pension with no success:

I applied for the special pension, but I did not receive the money. It was done by Amabutho. There is a child who is from New Brighton. Another one . . . they did the special pension application for me, but it never came out. They said we know that Ma-Mabhengeza was there. You see? (Ma-Mabhengeza, interview)

Zile Xolo, the APLA chairperson of the Jixini Branch in Mqanduli, outlined some of the challenges faced by women from APLA who applied for the special pension:

One of the problems is that the mothers did not know how to apply for the special pension. There was no one to assist them about how to apply, and so a lot of them were unsuccessful with the application. Then there was the opening of the Appeal Board and they appealed. It did not help because when a person has been unsuccessful the first time, it did not help when they tried other steps to apply. For example, their leader Nqeketho, the leader of the region, was arrested. He is a man. He then learned what one has to do when they are making the application. He then came back and taught others what they need to do when they apply, and the death certificates for the families who are applying on behalf of the deceased and birth certificates, etc. But, in spite of all of that, their applications were declined again. We think that the issue is that the special pension was started without the process of application being explained to people. And then they amended the section on children. The special pension allows your children to be the beneficiaries if the parent has died. The amount that they receive was just R50 000, when the parent has passed on. And then this provision was amended such that children of a certain age would no longer be eligible to receive this amount. This became a problem for those who made the application for their children to benefit *before* this provision was amended. These are some of the reasons that we are facing difficulties. One of the women in the area was so distraught after her application was not successful, that she suffered a stroke. The

other issue was that with the emergence of new IDs, there were problems with Home Affairs. Some of the women, ages of the women, were inaccurately captured by Home Affairs. Often, the actual age was reduced, and others increased, and they would have already made the application with an ID with another age, and a new one with correct age, and the different ages, which caused another problem for the application process (Xolo, interview).

Xolo provided other examples of the kinds of administrative problems faced by applicants, such as those pertaining to surnames:

We had a case of a Ma-Nquthula and her daughter-in-law. Ma-Nquthula is the second wife to her husband. The first wife died. When Nquthula married, her husband's son had a wife already. When she was arrested, she was arrested with her daughter-in-law. And yet now, when they applied and were each other's witnesses, they were asked why they have the same surname. They were witnesses for each other because they were arrested together. Their application was rejected because they share the same surname. You see, there are a lot of problems with the special pension (Xolo, interview).

Totsie Memela shared that when she applied for special pension, she was assumed to be the dependent of her late partner:

But then, over the years, there was now when the special pension started. I mean, it took years to apply for the special pensions, going to Pretoria, polishing chairs there, and . . . my husband died, the father of my children died. We had been married in exile. And an interesting thing happened, whereby they said to me I cannot get his money because there are two of us. But I didn't go to exile with him. I went to exile alone. It was not on his ticket that I went; I actually met him there, so my going there had nothing to do with him. But, besides, it's not about him; for me, it's about his children. So, it's only now I've had again –

I think it's more because my sister works in the Defence Force that I've been able to restart the process and I'm still in the process of applying for his money. He died long time ago. He died – Lesedi [her son] was how old? – Lesedi was 7 and he's now 24. I still don't have that money (Memela, interview).

There is an overwhelming sense that the institutional mechanisms provided by the government to support combatants of the people's war have not been sufficient to support them in rebuilding their lives after the war. Those who participated in the formal process of demobilisation had the benefit of a once-off payment and a possibility of receiving special pension, as some of the women did. But for the domestically based combatants, there has been almost no institutional support to allow them to pick up the pieces and transition into post-apartheid life.

The establishment of the DMV provided hope that it would address the limits of the initial demobilisation process, in terms of providing material support to destitute military veterans and also acknowledge and include non-statutory formations that were excluded in the initial process. The inclusion of Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA) military veterans in this new legislative framework shows that the definition of 'military veterans' continues to be redefined in democratic South Africa.

'Women are disappearing': The establishment of the Department of Defence and Military Veterans

The previous chapter shows that the legacy of South Africa's militarised past was largely subsumed under the Department of Defence, which was responsible for co-ordinating programmes to assist demobilised soldiers' transitions into civilian life. Writing in the *Cape Times* newspaper, Gwinyayi Dzinesa argued that 'President Jacob Zuma's reorganisation of South Africa's defence ministry into the Ministry of Defence and Military Veterans, which is also tasked with the concerns of war veterans, is a recognition of the important place this group occupies in the body politic' (2009). For Dzinesa, this reconfigured visibility of veterans' issues by the government pointed to a recognition that 'thousands of South Africa's former liberation fighters are unemployed, lead destitute

lives, and suffer psycho-social problems'. Furthermore, he argued that the state was also reacting to anxieties that if veterans' sociopolitical issues were not addressed, 'their military training may cause – and in many cases has, in fact, caused – destitute veterans to turn to crime or become mercenaries'. He noted also that the announcement of the new institutional framework dedicated to military veterans 'is an outcome of the ANC's 2007 Polokwane Conference resolution to establish a presidential commission on military veterans, ahead of the introduction of a "comprehensive social package for all ex-combatants of former liberation armies"'. The 2007 ANC resolution recommended that 'the Ministry of Military Veterans be established as a matter of urgency' (ANC 2007: 35).

According to Dzinesa: 'The government should be commended for what could significantly pre-empt the disruptive potential of disenchanted freedom fighters. History has shown governments of neighbouring states, such as Zimbabwe and Namibia, which marginalised or neglected former liberation fighters, did so at their own peril as restive, poverty-stricken ex-fighters threatened national stability' (2009).

The Military Veterans Benefit Regulations were gazetted on 19 February 2014. The law entitles military veterans to the following benefits: compensation for injury, trauma and disease; counselling and treatment for mental illness and post-traumatic stress disorder; facilitation of employment placement; facilitation of business opportunities; subsidised public transport; access to health care; and housing and burial support.

Ayanda Dlodlo was quoted in *Business Day* newspaper as having said that uMkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association (MKMVA) had 'long been lobbying for recognition, including the establishment of its own ministry' (Johwa 2009). For Dlodlo, the 'first prize' would have been the establishment of a full military veterans ministry, thus 'the renamed department – the Department of Defence and Military Veterans Department – was a compromise, but a major gain for the veterans, many of whom live in poverty'. According to Wilson Johwa, Dlodlo reiterated the risk of military veterans turning to criminality, saying that the 'failure by the state to harness the skills of military veterans had led to the establishment of mercenary outfits'.

David Gerber (1994: 546) argues that there is a 'divided consciousness' in the public perception of military veterans: 'On the one hand, the veteran's heroism and sacrifices are celebrated and memorialized and debts of gratitude, both symbolic and material, are paid to him [*sic*]. On the other hand, the veteran also inspires anxiety and fear and is seen as a threat to social order and political stability' (1994: 546). Feminist literature on demobilisation and military veteran discourses shows that states have anxiety about male veterans, who are seen as heroes but also as possible threats to the country's security if their material concerns are not addressed. In South Africa, too, the popular image and anxiety about military veterans concerns male veterans.

As noted by Hugo van der Merwe and Guy Lamb, the SANDF integration process, based on the Certified Personnel Register (CPR), 'was integral in defining who constitutes South African ex-combatants' (2009: 10). They correctly point out: 'These definitions are hotly contested, no doubt because they have a role in influencing access to or exclusion from scarce resources and opportunities, as well as informing other processes, such as building of actual memory. These controversies continue as parliament debates the provision of new benefits for ex-combatants.'

The definition of a military veteran in the Military Veterans Act 18 of 2011 closely resembles the CPR-based definition. According to the Act, a military veteran is a South African citizen who:

- (a) rendered military service to any of the military organisations, statutory and non-statutory; which were involved on all sides of South Africa's Liberation War from 1960 to 1994; (b) served in the Union Defence Force before 1961; or (c) became a member of the new South African National Defence Force after 1994, and has completed his or her military training and no longer performs military service, and has not been dishonourably discharged from that military organisation or force.²

2. Military Veterans Act 18 of 2011, available from <https://www.gov.za/documents/military-veterans-act>.

Thus, the Act confines veteran status to the members of the statutory and non-statutory forces who participated in the integration and demobilisation process. This means that veteran status and benefits apply to the transnationally trained guerrilla combatants of the non-statutory forces. However, some research includes all categories of ex-combatants, beyond those of the transnationally trained MK and APLA forces (Gear 2002; Everatt 2006). This research shows that the informally trained and domestically based ex-combatants are in deep need of state assistance. The 2015 inclusion of veterans from AZANLA, the armed wing of the Azanian People's Organisation (AZAPO), whose members have now been invited to present themselves for verification of their roles as ex-combatants, points to a possible widening of veterans' status and benefits beyond the transnationally trained combatants. Since 2014, the DMV has been verifying the combatant status of members of AZANLA. The inclusion of AZANLA combatants may open up a space for the further inclusion of the domestically based ex-combatant organisations, such as the members of the Gqeberha-based Amabutho I interviewed.

Gender-specific language is not present in the legislative framework of the DMV. The encompassing category of 'veteran' is understood to represent the interests of all veterans. The material and symbolic needs of 'veterans' do not demonstrate an understanding that while veterans, as a group, are socio-economically marginalised, the ways in which this marginality is expressed may differ in specific ways for women and men. The presence of women, as a category, is usually only shown in the July/August issue of the DMV's magazine, *Honour*, in celebration of women's month. Although this special issue seeks to highlight the role of women in general, and women combatants more specifically, there is limited detail given to the lives of women beyond a celebration of known women combatants and a rhetorical celebration of women's contributions to the anti-apartheid struggle.

The cover of the July/August 2013 issue of *Honour* has a large image of Ruth Mompati, and smaller pictures of three other women veterans (Phumla Williams, Ellen Molekane and retired Colonel Mokolanyane Patricia Moeti) with the caption, 'We celebrate and honour women military veterans for their contribution'. The magazine highlights 'the first re-union for the uMkhoto we Sizwe Women Military Veterans',

which was held on 17 August 2013 at '9 South African Infantry Battalion (9SAI) in Khayelitsha, Cape Town' (Nkosi 2013: 7). The article on the event by Mpho Nkosi does not share the various issues that women discussed at the reunion, beyond affirming women's roles in the armed struggle and the challenges that remain to fulfil the achievement of their human rights.

Two of the women I interviewed, Nomfundiso Kulati and Phumla Mgaba, attended this reunion. In Nkosi's article, Kulati is noted for having read a poem by Maya Angelou (2013: 7). When I asked Kulati and Mgaba about the event, they noted their delight at seeing old comrades that they had not seen in years and expressed hopes that this was the beginning of a process by the DMV to support women veterans. Kulati was more interested in the DMV's bursary support for her children. The fact that this was the first reunion of MK women points to the lack of institutional mechanisms to support veterans more broadly, and women specifically. The women who were reunited were all transnationally trained guerrillas.

It is the transnationally trained woman combatant who is venerated and is understood as deserving of the DMV's support. In our interview, Tsepe Motumi noted that the Women Military Veterans Association of South Africa (WOMVASA) was formed to address the specific needs of women veterans. None of the women that I interviewed spoke of being part of WOMVASA or of benefiting from its existence.

The women I interviewed expressed a desire to receive benefits facilitated by the DMV. Few of them had access to the department, either in their provinces or the headquarters. There is a sense that the department is out of reach for many women and that its processes are highly bureaucratic. As a result, none of the women were yet benefiting from the stated benefits offered by the DMV.

In our interview in 2014, Makhosazana Xaba spoke about the interview process that is part of the verification process for individuals to be part of the DMV database:

Round about early last year I got a call from somebody else that I was at the camp with, Ndumiso, and he says, 'Why aren't you on this, you know, they're putting everybody on that list again'

(because in the process people were left out) ‘and I was talking to Tsepe [Motumi] and Tsepe says he hasn’t seen you’. And I said, ‘You know, I don’t know how many times I’ve tried following up on this process and it just feels so cumbersome for me so I left.’ He says, ‘No, no, no, no. Tsepe’s now in charge of that. He’ll help you.’ So, I called Tsepe: ‘So what do I need to do?’ He says go to the verification committee in Braamfontein, give evidence there and then they’ll come back to me after that. I said, ‘Oh okay, fine.’ So I go there (it was in March last year), I sit in this room, they record everything and they start asking me questions about the trees that grew around Pango [MK camp in Angola]: ‘What kind of trees were they?’ They asked me about the circumference of an AK-47 cylinder. They asked me about the size of a grenade. I lost it. I lost it and started crying. I tried not to scream. There were all these SANDF people, SANDF, MK, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, represented in this committee: all these big, fat men. I ended up looking like a fake and I said, ‘You know, I didn’t think I was coming here to answer questions that sound like I’m in primary school, you know. If I had known that that’s what I’m supposed to do, I probably would’ve gone somewhere and got a list, so that I would answer this for you. You want to know when I was there? I can tell you. You want to know who my commander was at that time – I don’t remember. I didn’t try to keep names in my head. You know what kind of situation we were under. If you’re asking me about how to cock a gun, I don’t want to be an SANDF person. I don’t want to be in the military, so I’ve forgotten all these things deliberately.’ I cried. I felt so horrible inside . . . But now I’m more curious because I’ve been told by Ndumiso that you can get medical aid for yourself and your daughter. You can get a bursary. And I’m thinking, but I do need those things now, you know. My daughter is at varsity, her father has died. You know, I’m going to be very old soon, I’ll need medical aid. Maybe I should pursue this. But things just fizzled out completely until Mandela died and I bump into somebody that I was at university with in town and he says, ‘Where have you been? I haven’t seen you.’ We hadn’t seen each other since

varsity. And so, I tell him what happens. He says, 'No but Tsepe is my friend. Tsepe is my friend.' I say, 'Tsepe didn't! I followed up and followed up. Tsepe just left me hanging because I didn't remember anything, and I broke down and cried. I was a bad case, so to speak, and Tsepe couldn't help.' So, he says, 'No, no, no, I want to talk to Tsepe, I want to talk to Tsepe.' So, we are trying to revive that right now, so I don't know how it's going to go (Xaba, interview).

In August 2016, Xaba updated me with the news that she had eventually managed to find the commander that she had served under, who was now working in China. She was then about to restart the process of verification. From her experience, combatants who undertake the verification process are not only expected to endure an interview, but their success also depends on the collaboration of former comrades whose whereabouts they may not currently know. This elaborate process of verification may be one of the reasons that the process has demonstrated limited success. Few military veterans have been successfully verified.

Joyce Sifuba noted that for many APLA veterans, it is difficult to access assistance as most institutional assistance is confined to Gauteng. She pointed out that most women 'are disappearing' in terms of this process because they do not have time to attend countless veterans' meetings when they have families to look after, nor the resources to travel to Pretoria to the headquarters of the DMV:

I go to Pretoria often, because my children are there, and they are soldiers. So, what about someone who does not have a child in the system? And I get things because Ama-Afrika [PAC members] who are in high positions in the system still contact me. But what about those who do not have these opportunities, who are left out of the system? . . . The person says to themselves, 'Let me stay here in the township and eat whatever I have.' Women are disappearing. Like I said, there are MVA [military veterans association] meetings, but there are very few women. If you see ten women in a meeting, that will be a lot. I hope that with this research you are doing, you can apply for more

funds, so that you can find these women . . . It needs a person to constantly go to the meetings. When they say there is a meeting, you must go to that meeting and voice your concerns. I voiced out to Mr Mlambo that we should search for these women. And these women, they came and are breadwinners. So, when they say there is a meeting in Gauteng and I am in Port Elizabeth [Gqeberha], how will I get to Gauteng? The money I would use to travel from Port Elizabeth to Gauteng is the money I need to use to buy food for my children. You see, now you are wasting money because of the economic situation that we are in these days (Sifuba, interview).

Other women ex-combatants also complained about the centralisation of the DMV in its Pretoria offices and also mentioned that they need the assistance of colleagues who work in government, with computer and printing facilities, to complete the forms. Nomfundiso Kulati complained that the DMV's emphasis on assisting veterans within a certain salary bracket disadvantages those who are employed. She was disputing that measuring access to veterans' benefits by salary does not take into account the multiple financial responsibilities that many individuals like her carry:

In terms of the Veterans Act . . . I'm entitled to a house. I'm entitled to education if I want to study, including my children. But I also learnt, okay, I earn a salary; okay, I'm a single mom. But they want my payslip. When they look at my payslip, they think I can afford, which I cannot. Look, one of my kids now is at tertiary and I mean, it's expensive, education these days and the other one will be at tertiary next year. Remember now, I have boys – there are all these initiations and this and that. I'm not entitled to that house because by virtue of having . . . of working for government even though I've sacrificed so much at a young age. Our story is a story that needs to be looked at seriously by the leadership again. Yes, they talk about it very nicely at conferences, Polokwanes and these other previous conferences as if things will be done, but nothing much has happened (Kulati, interview).

While it is understandable why the DMV would prioritise the needs of the desperately poor, Kulati's sentiments demonstrate the ways in which the framework has to consider the different interests of ex-combatants. Overall, women expressed a sense of confusion over the processes of the DMV and took a wait-and-see approach. Many felt that the department is still new; therefore, perhaps with time, its administrative performance might evolve to make the DMV more accessible to different types of combatants in different parts of the country, especially women.

I now turn to the personal, social and psychological transitions that women combatants have negotiated for themselves.

Personal reintegration

The formal integration and demobilisation process that some women participated in was only one aspect of the reintegration that the women combatants had to undertake after 1994. The dead bodies of loved ones that remain unaccounted for inside and outside the country, and the lack of payment of reparations for those who testified as victims before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), point to an unrelenting 'woundedness' that continues to pervade post-apartheid life for many veterans. This section examines women veterans' reintegration into peaceful civilian life beyond the state process of demobilisation and civilian reintegration. The anxieties of the women who were separated from family in exile are made visible, along with the profound pain and uncertainty of being reunited with their family, and the enduring psychological trauma that is palpable in the lives of all women combatants.

Coming home: 'I don't know you'

For the South African women who went outside the country to receive training, coming back to South Africa following the unbanning of the national liberation movements was a tale of its own that offered no guarantee that they would find their families alive. There is evidence from other post-war societies showing that survivors of war deal with overlapping cases of trauma as they attempt to recover their lives in the context of peace.³ The separation and displacement that resulted from

3. For example, the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of the Liberia Diaspora Project revealed evidence of the 'triple trauma' paradigm among

apartheid violence is not unique in this case. The process of returning home after years of separation was, for many women, replete with personal, social, political and economic uncertainty. Joyce Sifuba pointed out that the ways in which the repatriation process was carried out left many people to fend for themselves with little to no social security:

When people were repatriated when they came in, the United Nations has nothing to do with it. When you get home, you were dropped off, and from there, you have to fend for yourself. Your own organisation must see to it that it gives you information: where to get help, or where to get assistance (Sifuba, interview).

Besides the anxiety regarding arriving home, the biggest concern for many women was about the well-being of their families and their ability to rebuild relationships. It was particularly difficult for the women who had left young children behind when they left the country. Belinda Martin expressed the anguish of returning home to dying parents and a daughter who did not know her:

1991, I came back home. Things were horrible when I came back home. The family was the family – was not the family I knew. You understand? Everything was topsy-turvy at home because my mom was in hospital. My dad was also not too well – he had cancer. I was at home for a month before my mum passed away in my arms. I had just given her a bath one morning in June and she passed on. And June, July, August, my dad passed away, the same year. 1991. Also in my arms, after bathing him . . . my daughter, my brother's daughter, my stepsister's son were being

Liberians who fled the country to Ghana, the Ivory Coast, the United States, the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The triple trauma paradigm posits that 'refugees experience trauma in the country of origin, during flight and in the country of refuge' (Foster et al. 2009: 303). Liberians shared traumatic tales of how they were forced to leave Liberia after witnessing brutal killings of family members, of the hardship in trying to escape through Liberian borders that were overtaken by rebels, of starting a new life in a country with no material assets, and a family that was either all killed or scattered over West Africa.

taken care of by my parents and they were absolutely traumatised. They could never accept me. And they always thought: 'Now that you're back, you're coming to try and take over, when we were the ones who suffered with your parents when you were not here' and things like that. And my daughter especially felt I abandoned her. Ja, and would never accept me as her mother. When my mum, the coffin went down, she said to me at the grave, 'There goes my mother. I don't know you.' You know. And it took years – it took years for us to have a mother-daughter relationship (Martin, interview).

Pumza Dyantyi expressed her anxiety of starting afresh at home, while the peers that she had left behind seemed to have met the professional and material expectations of adulthood:

Well, it was not easy when I arrived. Remember that when you come back, you see peers, people that you grew up with, they have cars and you are just coming back. You have no work, you have nothing. It was not easy to depend on your family to give you something. But it didn't take me too long to get a job. But it's a very tough time to adjust, but the thing I am thankful to God for is that my mother was still alive. At least, because there are those who came home and there were no homes, there was nothing. At least, I still have some people. It was very difficult, very (Dyantyi, interview).

Major General Jackie Sedibe shared the shock and disappointment she felt when she tried to open a bank account at First National Bank (FNB) upon her return and was asked to provide a letter of permission from her husband:

You know, one time I decided when we came back, I decided I need to open up an account. So I went to the bank, FNB . . . and they asked me, 'Where is the permission from your husband?'. . . I was taken aback . . . And I'm saying, 'No. I have no husband. It's me . . . I'm trying to open up an account.' They say,

‘No, either go to someone senior who must write a letter to allow you.’ I was shocked . . . You know when they say, ‘I was shocked to the core’? You know when your knees shake? I spent all my life [in the struggle in exile]. I joined MK when I was sixteen. I come back and I’m still subjected. It was really a mixture of anger, shock . . . I went to the ANC and I asked them to write a letter because they say someone of authority should write you a letter. I went back and I say, ‘Okay, here’s a letter’ and I say, ‘whoever writes policy, Constitution, that’s the first that must go’ (Sedibe, interview).

The process of repatriation for those who had left the country was coupled with anxieties about the status of their families and the transition from often unstable transnational life to the task of grounding themselves within their communities again after years, and sometimes decades, of separation. They also faced the task of building new professional identities that would determine their economic security in post-apartheid South Africa.

Political involvement

For many women, their past roles in the anti-apartheid struggle have shaped their current political involvement – and lack thereof. In the main, most women remain politically involved in African National Congress (ANC), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and Amabutho structures. Some of them hold leadership positions at branch, provincial and national levels. For the women who are poor, it is difficult for them to explain why they support a party that has not yielded material benefits for them. Ma-Boniswa shared that her

eldest child often asks, ‘Why are we still with the ANC because there is nothing it has given you?’ Even the youngest child is tired of it. But I like the ANC; I live because of the ANC. I bought my children *Sarafina* the movie to show them how white people used to treat us because the youngest one used to come from school telling me about the DA [Democratic Alliance], ‘The DA this and that’. I would get upset by that. But now they understand (Ma-Boniswa, interview).

Ma-Thandiswa expressed similar sentiments, explaining that although she survives by doing domestic work, she will remain an ANC member:

The [children] usually laugh and say, 'But Mama, you are still struggling'. I respond by saying, 'Yes, we were struggling for you'. Even now, we are still ANC here at home; no one will change and join Helen Zille's party [Democratic Alliance]. We are ANC, our vote will go to ANC, not any other party. If you look at Cape Town, black people are still oppressed, and yet they vote for Helen Zille. White people are still living well, we are struggling. To white people, I will die a kaffir. I tell my children that if they have to fight a Boer for more money at work, they must fight them there not from the outside, you can't fight from outside (Ma-Thandiswa, interview).

And yet, Ma-Boniswa also expressed a seemingly contradictory statement, when she noted:

People who are doing better are those who were always privileged. Those who were poor are still poor. It is as if on top of the oppression they experienced, there is another layer that has been added. It is worse now. It is as if it would be better if we were not free because the way I see it we were better off when we were being chased by the Boers (Ma-Boniswa, interview).

Ma-Boniswa's statement illuminates the tensions of living in a South Africa that is becoming more economically unequal; in the supposedly democratic South Africa, class divisions are more pronounced than ever.

Winnie Tukashe, who was in the leadership of the Port Elizabeth Women's Organisation (PEWO), reflected that the amalgamation of organisations such as PEWO into the ANC Women's League was perhaps a mistake because women have stopped organising. Instead, women only grieve at funerals and are not doing the political organising that is needed in their communities. She said that because of her ailing health, she grew tired of attending political meetings, but also because politicians are 'liars' (Tukashe, interview). Ma-Mafutha also expressed

that most people are in politics for personal gain and, for that reason, she dedicated her life to God, rather than politics (Ma-Mafutha, interview).

Psychological trauma: 'Okay, we will shoot each other'

In her keynote address at the colloquium “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’ in 2021, Thandi Modise spoke about some of the difficulties of facing the traumas of being an ex-combatant and a former prisoner:

There may be women in MK who missed a number of things, find it easy to tell the stories of the armed struggle, but the combination of women and ex-prisoners make it an extra difficult situation. Firstly, some of us are suffering from blockages, where certain things that happened to women have been blocked. They come back in bits and pieces. Sometimes we still dissolve into tears and sometimes we actually don’t get out of our bedrooms because we got used to prison. Somebody who must come and ring a bell, somebody who must unlock, somebody who must permit you to walk out.

This reflection by Modise provides a rare glimpse into the legacies of occupying the double positions of former combatant and prisoner. The reality is that women like her sometimes struggle to get up; they sometimes return to the mindset of a prisoner who must be given permission to get up and walk out. Modise’s role as the ‘knitting needles guerrilla’ is lauded, yet in reality she spent longer as a prisoner than she did as a combatant. The fixation with her combatant identity means that there is little room to reflect on the psychological legacies of her having been a prisoner.

The theme of trauma is a central one in the research about the post-military lives of combatants. Studies have shown that beyond social and economic marginalisation, there is extensive post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and woundedness from the violence of apartheid (Mokalobe 2001; Liebenberg and Roefs 2001; Mashike and Mokalobe 2003; Gear 2002; Van der Merwe and Lamb 2009; Lamb 2013). The work on well-being of formerly conscripted white soldiers in the

South African Defence Force (SADF) also reveals unaddressed trauma (Edlmann 2014). The absence of literature on women's experiences of demobilisation means that the testimonies by women to the TRC are the only ones that represent the psychological trauma that women have suffered as a result of the war (Ross 2003; Motsemme 2011). The suggestion of cataloguing women's multiple sources of trauma has focused on women's sexual abuse in MK camps (Mokalobe 2001; Van der Merwe and Lamb 2009). The experiences that are articulated below offer a rich and distinctive account of the multiple sources of trauma that have not been articulated in other work.

Nomsa Ngcipe expressed how the burden of the multiple pressures she faced on returning home were essentially health issues:

Look, things were challenging, but I never went to counselling, *nè*? But I had a challenge, for instance, when I got back home, there were so many things I could not understand why they were happening that way, you know. I wanted to fix everything at once, forgetting that we had gotten back to reality and that things would not go the way you wish. So, I developed a low blood pressure, and with the low blood pressure I used to get admitted in hospital now and again. And, you know the other thing really I didn't mention was that when I left for exile, I had a baby who I left, who was a year and a few months – a son. Now, when I came back, I got back, and my son did not know me. That was my biggest challenge, really. It was difficult because he stayed with my mother's sister. When I got back, she prevented me seeing him. I had serious struggles with my aunt, serious struggles with my aunt in terms of my child. So much struggle that there was a time that I really hated her. I thought I would never forgive her for preventing me to bond with my child, by all means. And I even ask myself, what kind of parent would prevent another parent not to bond with their child, and she calls herself my aunt, you see? So, I had such struggles. I did not understand how some people do certain things. So, I would spend time in hospital with low blood pressure, stressing about this and that.

But one day, while sleeping in hospital, I told myself that, ‘you know what, it’s not going to help me stressing, so I better take one step at a time’ (Ngcipe, interview).

Fundiswa Menzeni of Amabutho explained that the daily violence experienced under apartheid has physical and mental implications for the mental well-being of individuals today. Here, she highlights the lingering traumatic smell of the police tear gas: ‘Sometimes you observe that there are problems, such as lack of health, people are not doing so well . . . most of them were beaten too much by the Boers. The tear gas because they mess up with you internally. You see the tear gas, yes’ (Menzeni, interview).

Fezeka Klaas said that she is not able to look at a dead body because she saw too many people who were killed brutally: ‘It affects me badly, Sisi. Even now when a person passes away, even if they were sick, I cannot look at the body. I cannot look at the body, regardless of who it is (Klaas, interview).

Nonfundiso Kulati spoke about her battle with anger, about living with memories of torture in jail, and the difficult times in exile:

Honestly, when it comes to trauma, it manifests in many different ways. Yes, I don’t drink. We do suffer from that post-traumatic stress in a way. I mean, you can imagine having to be in jail at a young age, to be detained and beaten up at a young age and leave. That would affect you psychologically. It’s not like anybody was meant to leave and train in conditions that you never really, I mean, expect you to find yourself in, you know, to be . . . It does manifest, because at times you have this unexpected anger, you know. Okay, you try sometimes to manage it, but you – it’s difficult at times; it’s not easy (Kulati, interview).

Ntombizodwa Zondo (*nom de guerre* Mbali Ngwenya) joined AZANLA in 1986 at the age of fourteen. She was based at Dukwe, a refugee camp in Botswana, where she received political and military training. At the colloquium “‘S’obashaya ngamatye”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’, she spoke about how she hates standing in

queues because at the camp they had to stand in line to receive rationed food:

Remember, in exile, we were like beggars. We were not choosers because you would then be – you would be standing in long queues. Queues where you need your ration for your week or for two weeks. So, we were surviving on rations, you know, and as a result, today I still find myself – I can't bear with long queues. Long queues are just a nightmare for me.

Nkosazana Sobantu spoke about the ways in which women struggle in personal relationships, especially with partners whom they do not perceive as having been active in the struggle, but are benefiting today, while they themselves struggle:

Those who are suffering mostly are the women with social relations. Sometimes you see when someone is trying to study, but they still have that image that they are a soldier, and sometimes, she is dating someone who is not a soldier, who does not understand the way she feels. Sometimes you see a picture of something, maybe corruption, and the person comments by saying that, 'We did not struggle for this', and yet that person was not there during the struggle, and the person is benefitting from the struggle today. They were never arrested, did not go to exile, and were not part of Amabutho, but today he is benefiting (Sobantu, interview).

Pamela Daniels shared about the difficulties she faced in her first marriage with a fellow MK member. Due to their training, she noted that they would come close to attacking each other. She struggled with meeting the expectations that families have within a patriarchal society:

But also, what I see as a major, major problem is the fact that we went to a state of war; as you know. When a soldier falls, you can't leave him. You must carry your dirt, you must watch your dirt, you must take care of them. You see, you live, you do all

those things, and you come back there's no debriefing, there's no psychological debriefing; and you are expected to integrate and live a normal life. I mean, really, that's not practical, that's not realistic . . . you see, being in the military you live in a certain way. There are these rules; there's a discipline of the military, and you tend to want to live that way even in a family environment, and that will translate to a lot of . . . challenges with children. Because, with my late husband, we were both soldiers and, and even when we do things, we used to come to a point where we would say, 'Okay, we will shoot each other' because we were equally trained in our own individual rights . . . And, and, and families would not understand that way of doing things . . . (Daniels, interview).

Most women have found different ways to deal with psychological trauma, often outside of seeking professional help. In the main, most of the women I interviewed are still going through individual journeys of reconciling their current behaviours with the past. They share their experiences of the past with family members, often their children, as a way to appreciate the present and to reconcile with the wounds of the past. It is clear from my research that greater institutional attention ought to be paid to women's psychological well-being. But one gets the impression that although communities are aware that women suffer from these difficulties, often women are expected to endure unremittingly. The adage that women are 'stronger than men' psychologically obscures the real ways in which women's trauma remains unaddressed and should be urgently prioritised.

Women are stronger than men

During my research, I noticed that was a repeated articulation of women's emotional and psychological strength, which enabled them to better withstand difficulties than their male counterparts. When asked if women had been involved or attempted to engage in violent and criminal activities when they found themselves facing economic and personal challenges, women's strength was expressed as a way of pointing to women's coping capabilities. Pumza Dyantyi used strength as a way

of explaining why destitute women ex-combatants have not turned to alcoholism, as have their male counterparts:

Lots of people are destitute, MK; both women and men. That's why there is not much difference, but men tend to be more accepted than women. I suppose we are stronger than them . . . Psychologically stronger than them, because you find a woman that has been exiled who is not working, who is trying to make ends meet, who is not a drunkard and an alcoholic. But you'll find men, most of them are alcoholics. I think it's a matter of them being strong psychologically (Dyantiyi, interview).

Another MK ex-combatant also argued that women may be perceived to be physically weaker than men, but held that they are psychologically stronger than them:

I believe that men are naturally weaker than women. We may be weaker physically, *nè*, because we are called 'the weaker sex'. Physically we may be weak, but in terms of our mindset, we are stronger than men and we are used to dealing with pain. I think we are also designed to take care of others, and men are not designed for that, hence they break so easy. And they bottle things inside. We talk about things when they bother us, you know. We cry and most men still believe that men are not supposed to cry. It's a healing process to cry. So, I didn't really have to go through the counselling process (Ngcipe, interview).

Pamela Daniels reiterated this point:

The male character is different from ours. We are children bearers. We are home builders. We are the ones who are supposed to be strong for the family. We are caring for the families. And I would think that we are supposed to be having the same responsibility. But what I have experienced is that our male counterparts, they abuse alcohol – not that we don't have those challenges as women, but it's at a much rather controllable rate than our male

counterparts. Maybe because also we stayed with them in these camps in exile; they got married to foreign women; we were just brothers. Even though we were women, we were soldiers; they did not look our way. But when we came back, our families were there. Families did not accept the women that they came back with and it created a lot of tension, and they become targets to women (of course, no offence), women inside the country with this belief that they are having money; they have all these benefits, and every other thing that is happening. As you can see, we live in a society where you are who you are because of what you have. So, I think these are the challenges that we are facing, that we are seeing in our counterparts of course. We also have challenges, but we are in a much better place than our male counterparts – MK women, that is (Daniels, interview).

Motsemme (2004) points out that often women's use of silence as a coping strategy is interpreted as their strength, in a sense that it is read as women's capacity to withstand high levels of pain and physical and mental violation. She argues that the 'strong woman' myth has contributed to the narrow understanding of women's emotions and that 'women's notion of pain, suffering, humiliation and joy remain limited within the social sciences' (2004: 924). As Motsemme explains:

The stoic figure is, of course, a very common one in African women's iconography. A stoic person is basically someone who appears unaffected by emotions, and is generally admired for showing patience in the face of adversity . . . themes of resignation, endurance, and grief so memorably embodied in women's stoic bodies, are strong themes in surviving oppression and poverty. In this sense stoicism is then strongly associated with *performing dignity* in the midst of hardship (2011: 116).

The imposed and self-ascribed notion of women's strength is the unarticulated but accepted assumption in the literature regarding why, for instance, women have not used their military training to pose a security threat to the state or their communities after 1994. It is important to

point to these silences in the narratives provided by the women and the ways in which they reveal the extent to which women 'cope' with the transition to civilian life, as well as how this same narrative of strength poses the danger of obscuring women's need for assistance in integration materially and psychologically. One can imagine that the image of the stoic figure becomes amplified when one is a combatant. The historical images of the sacrificial soldier and the sacrificial African mother become intertwined and thereby leave little room for women to articulate their personal challenges and their need for state assistance.

When Cynthia Enloe (1983) asks if women are an integral part of post-war transformation, could we argue that states are well aware that the patriarchal understanding of sacrifice allows men, exclusively, to claim the rewards of their sacrifices from the state? This is while women who sacrificed on behalf of national liberation do not have the same recourse to claim that which is due to them. In this regard, the celebration of strength by women ex-combatants is not surprising in a context where their sacrifice does not guarantee material benefits from the state. On the other hand, patriarchal understandings of violence do not allow for a narrative where women ex-combatants can threaten the state with the tools of their military training in a post-apartheid context, since violence is masculinised.

Memory: 'Please, I mustn't die before [he] is 21'

The theme of civilian life is often applied more to the women who fit the conventional understanding of 'combatant'. In South Africa, this applied to the women who were trained militarily outside the country. Some of the literature on integration in South Africa and elsewhere points to a self-perception by former combatants that even after demobilisation, they are fundamentally different to other civilians. This is often articulated in the adage, 'Once a soldier, always a soldier'. I wanted to understand the ways in which a military past shapes the ways in which demobilised women perform their civilian lives. Brenda Badela explained:

We have this term: 'Once a soldier, always a soldier'. Although I'm not a soldier, an active soldier, I'm still a cadre of the ANC . . . discipline, order in the house, and democracy, is something I

don't believe in, because in my army days, you know, we would be told there's no democracy in the army. So, on some days, in my house, I would say there's no democracy, so I'd always fight with my kids, and they'd tell me, 'Mama, this is not MK camps here, this is the house', you know (Badela, interview).

Nomsa Ngcipe said that at her workplace she is perceived differently to her colleagues because of her military past:

I mean even at work, in a meeting we would be debating, and if there's something I need to raise, they will hear it from my tone, that it is a soldier speaking now, not just anyone. Even at home, I think once you trained as a soldier, that thing stays with you, irrespective of where you are. It's not the kind of training you easily . . . you don't wear it away, understand? So even when I walk – most women are ladies when they walk. I can't even walk slowly. When I walk, it is clear that I am walking. Sexy shoes would never work because they break. I put my shoe down (Ngcipe, interview).

Nomfundiso Kulati articulated that in her everyday life, she behaves like a soldier. This has influenced who she associates with on a social level. Mostly importantly, she notes that her military past has shaped her into becoming an independent woman:

In my life, in a way, being a woman at times, it has made me to be very independent. I don't like to be controlled. I like to think independently. And behaving like a soldier at all times. I don't like to take orders. That's not nice. I always want to lead others, that's my problem. Yes, not arrogantly, but at times it irritates to find people, you know, my school of thought is different from the South African public. I mean, I can't even – I don't even have friends like the people that I mingle with: either they were in exile, either they are very political, so I can't just befriend the ordinary women of South Africa because their mindset is too narrow (Kulati, interview).

Joyce Sifuba explained that she is suspicious of placing soldiers on a pedestal as the ones with discipline among undisciplined civilians. She described how behaviour depends on individuals:

I think it depends with the person, really, because you find that these same soldiers are not disciplined. You find them without discipline. I quarrelled with one that I was asking if he was inside or outside, but the discipline is not there. So, I quickly, because of my age, I quickly reprimanded him. I am a mommy, even in the office. My children, they always say I'm not a good person because I speak out. I don't let something that is wrong pass me by. Not that I'm perfect but . . . (Sifuba, interview).

Makhosazana Xaba provided a different perspective, stating that because she never participated in combat, she does not identify with a distinctive soldier mentality. Instead, she pointed out that her past work in the underground is what affects her current daily habits, such as the importance of keeping time:

I never fought, so I waited for *umtshayina* [being chosen by the leadership for a mission home] and I never had to fight. So, if soldier mentality comes from fighting, I don't have it. If I were to talk about mentality at all, it would be the mentality of living underground because that is what I did a lot of, and sometimes I have to stop myself doing certain things that I know come from there, from that experience. So, is that being a soldier? Yes, but in a traditional sense? No. You know? So, I don't know if I would say, 'Once a soldier, always a soldier', in that sense, but I know that, I mean, I've always been . . . there's a small example: I told you how when we were working underground, we could only ever be three together. If I'm having a meeting with you at two o'clock; if you're not there by five-past, I leave because it's unsafe. Now even before I had to do that, I just, I'm the kind of person who likes being on time . . . And people say to me, 'Can't you just chill? People get late, people get . . .' and I said, 'No', you know. Now what's the worst thing that could've happened? He

ran late, we wait, nothing, really . . . When I go into a restaurant and I see, I choose a seat that's got a wall behind me, I won't just go at any table. Now it's no longer because I feel I'm at risk, but now the excuse is (it's not an excuse, it's still genuine) but I'm a writer so I need to look and observe and see things (Xaba, interview).

Xaba continued to share that the premise of underground work was one's ability to conceal the truth. She revealed that after apartheid, she had to learn that revealing the truth is no longer a security risk, especially in how she was to raise her daughter.

I mean, I can sit with someone – I had to tell myself this morning that she's going to be interviewing me, so I must be open. I've given her the time. I'm happy to talk. But I can talk to someone for three hours and they can walk away not knowing a thing about me. I mean, I do remember a time when my daughter was young, when I consciously said to myself, 'You can't be a parent and lie' because I was so used to having to lie about everything – about my existence – that I found that I was lying when it was not necessary and I had to say to myself, 'You no longer have to. You're safe now. You're home. You're free. You don't have to lie about anything. And you're raising a child, so stop it.' I remember that being very, very hard because part of lying was to just not be known. It was about removing anything that anybody could use about you. So it wasn't lying because then you might be caught or, you know, it wasn't a . . . I mean there were different kinds of lying. If I'm just meeting a complete stranger and we happen to be sitting at a bus stop and we're talking, I'm not going to tell who I am. You see? But that's not because the stranger might follow me. It's just because part of keeping safe is that you must be anonymous. And then there's lying because there's a reason to lie. But when you've done that for so long, I personally found that it was very, very hard . . . I actually have a theory that the reason that a lot of ANC people – I say ANC people because those are the ones that I know, but I think it

might be applicable to PAC and others – the reason they tell so many lies is because they are not conscious of the fact that they no longer need to . . . because if lying was protective you have to be very conscious, and say, I no longer need that shield, so I will stop lying. I mean, your mind, your body learns certain habits (Xaba, interview).

During the colloquium “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’, Totsie Memela shared that she has a constant fear of arrest because of her role as a combatant infiltrating MK combatants inside South Africa:

The one thing that I think continues to traumatise me, and I can only refer to it as trauma, is when I go through airports. I mean, I love travelling, but each time I pass through an airport, I think I’m going to get arrested because I used to travel between countries to go and infiltrate people, and in many instances, I would be leaving Zimbabwe, going – using a forged South African passport and when I get to Swaziland, I think they are going to stop me. I remember once I was going with Ivan [Pillay]. At that particular time, I had a Swazi passport and one of the immigration officers said to Ivan, ‘Oh, so we are going to arrest you for having taken our sister.’ So, we thought we had been bust. Little did we understand that he was basically making a joke.

Another former combatant disclosed that her military past, especially her experiences of losing close friends to violent deaths, has shaped her own relationship with death. It has informed the ways in which she relates to her family, especially her children:

You know before I had a child, death was – ja, you know, it happens. And when I reflect on my experience, I remember when I was pregnant with him, I was five months pregnant and that . . . during the war against Inkatha and that’s I guess that last real fight when we kicked them out of the township. Basically, I’d

made a decision that I'm not bringing up a child in this violence. Either I stop it or I die. It was that straightforward. It was, so my relationship with death was – so I could easily take risks on me, in that sense. And it's also the first time that I had coffee in my entire pregnancy because I was there from about after seven [p.m.] lying on top of a shack in the shooting . . . When I got home, his dad was sitting outside on the stoep with my mum. They didn't know whether I'm alive or dead or whatever and stuff like that, you know. So it kind of gives different meaning to life, my life, in the sense that things that I would do before [he] was born that would be risky on my life, I think twice about them. But I think as they are growing up, I mean, one of the things I do (now I'm doing less and less of them), I never thought I'd be this age. I actually never thought I'd be 21, so that's my, so it was, I never thought I'd be 21 . . . I celebrate my birthday seriously every year . . . I know we're supposed to take that for granted that I'll be 27, I'll be 30. I never did. I never did. I always was conscious, so every year, I celebrate the extra year I have, and at some point I had this real dream that I'm grateful that I got to the age that I am, but please, I mustn't die before [he] is 21, to be able to look after his brother, you know. And, ja. Last year, I made a big party, because he turned 21 (Anonymous, interview).

All women combatants struggle with the psychological traumas of the violence of life under apartheid. As noted in Chapter 3, a woman who was a combatant in Amabutho told me that for a long time, she could not eat meat, because she had seen too many people killed in front of her. The visceral nature of that image is one that surely stays with all combatants in different ways. It is my view that if we understood the legacies of fighting for national liberation, the intimacy in which the violence was experienced and enacted, we may be better able to understand violence in South Africa today. South Africa distinguishes itself in Africa and the world by the brutal tactics used to murder, mutilate and rape. The character of this violence is connected to the nature of violence during apartheid.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown how different women combatants have transitioned to post-apartheid South Africa. The accounts of experiences by women who were demobilised build on the literature on the process of demobilisation, by illuminating women's experiences, which have up to now been muted in that literature. The conclusion is that the demobilisation process did not offer institutional mechanisms that wholly supported the multiple challenges that faced women guerrillas in the transition to civilian life. Combative mothers and the young women who fought the armed struggle inside South Africa have had little to no institutional support – materially or psychologically – from the post-apartheid government. The special pension has been a flawed mechanism, which has proven to be an administrative nightmare for the women combatants and their dependents. Although the pension is supposedly open for all types of combatants, it is only the transnationally trained guerrillas that benefit from it. The economic marginalisation of most women combatants has enormous personal consequences because the personal sacrifices that women made have not translated to better lives for themselves and their families. This chapter also demonstrates that psychological trauma tends to be under-discussed in the lives of black women in general because the social pressure to be the bedrock of the family means that women are not able to voice their challenges with trauma and PTSD.

Conclusion

‘Where Their Seed Can Fall and Grow’

After all, these flowers of the nation are not being left on the table in a vase. After all, these flowers of the nation are beginning to be put on the ground, where their seed can fall and grow – because if you put the flowers of the nation in a vase, you actually ensure that they wither away, and they are forgotten.

— Thandi Modise¹

One of the epigraphs to the Introduction of this book is a quote from Thenjiwe Mtintso at the Politics of the Armed Struggle in Southern Africa Conference, held at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits) in 2016, in a panel discussion with Makhosazana Xaba and Raymond Suttner about their experiences of gender dynamics during the armed struggle in southern Africa. At that conference, a known student activist asked a question that Mtintso and Xaba have since reflected on in various public discussions about the legacies of women’s roles in the armed struggle. The question is long, but it is worth quoting in full:

I might just be a bit confused as to where I am, but from what I have gathered is that we are speaking about women’s contribution and their role within the MK [uMkhonto we Sizwe] movement. And what I get from what the speakers here articulated is essentially . . . what you are presenting to me is a

1. During the colloquium “*S’obashaya ngamatye*”: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’ on 9–10 August 2021.

victimisation of women in the struggle, to say that they have experienced violence under the state that they are fighting against, which is the apartheid era. But also, that they find themselves in another state of violence and for me you aren't able to articulate exactly what that state of violence is because essentially you isolate concepts of patriarchy to only being a concept from men to women. You don't speak about how the patriarchy that satisfies men also contributes to a large extent to this thing of patriarchal princesses that you find women replicating the same thing . . . and also the simple fact that I don't understand what women who were in the MK movement thought MK was about and the reason why I say this is because the gentlemen said. 'It is a revolution about women', then I ask myself: if women had understood their role and truly understood the purpose as being a revolutionary movement . . . how did they allow us 22 years later to not have land, to not have such and such . . . So, I am very confused. So, you want to celebrate women in the MK and I also want to do the same thing . . . my mother herself also fought with uMkhonto we Sizwe. But I am able to go home and critique my mother and critique that and say, 'Although you want to celebrate yourself, you celebrate yourselves in isolation.' So I want to understand – I don't want to say needs because they are used to objectify women to say they, to perform this sort of role. But I want to understand essentially when women were going to MK, were you going to MK to fight with other comrades, male comrades or were you going there with a resolution for a revolution? And instead of celebrating oneself, how do you then in that environment tackle patriarchy because twenty years later, you say there was patriarchy . . . and you were in this state of patriarchy and still said nothing. So I want to understand the feminism: is your feminism the white Western feminism or is it the black radical feminism that I know? Because the black radical feminism that I know deals with patriarchy when patriarchy decides to spear its head, so even if that's a black or a white man. As a black radical feminist, it is my duty to then deal with their patriarchy and also to correct them. That's why I am very

confused. I am here to learn, so please, parents, teach me what this feminism is in the MK revolution. Thank you.

This question captures the feelings of the generation of women that have grown up in post-apartheid South Africa. They understand that women's participation in national liberation contributed to the formal equality that they are able to enjoy today, but, as the student asks, it leaves unresolved women's structural poverty, landlessness and daily experiences of gender-based violence and femicide in democratic South Africa. The student seems to be saying that the celebration of MK women's roles, in this case, is individualised. More striking is the student's question about the kind of feminism that guided MK women's participation. While these questions were directed to MK women, it seems to me that they could be asked of all combatants across political parties and military wings.

Mtintso's response was that she did not think MK women

went and threw themselves into patriarchy – they actually left patriarchal societies and with very a clear intention, which is the liberation of their country . . . We were women – not women, we were girls actually – and therefore we were faced with a challenge of girlhood in fighting against apartheid especially in the military . . . I don't think that women commanders and other women were confused; we were never confused and, hence we say at the end of the day patriarchy did not stand . . . in fact we were able to deal with patriarchy within the structures of MK. We were *our own agents* (emphasis added).

Makhosazana Xaba reiterated her response at that conference in her keynote address during the colloquium “‘*S'obashaya ngamatye*’: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’ in 2021. As she said in 2016, women in MK did not have the opportunity to formally take feminism classes. Her generation advocated for the introduction of gender and feminist studies courses at universities and within organisations. She told a story of her mother's ability to secretly open a bank account without her husband's knowledge or permission as an example of her

feminism: ‘My feminism is the kind of feminism that I learned from my mother. The kind of feminism that says, “Do something. Act in order to change what is not working for you.”’

In this book, I hope to have shown that women in MK were, indeed, their own agents. They were not confused about the patriarchal nature of the national liberation movements or militarised and masculinised ideas about armed struggle and guerrilla warfare. As Naomi Ribbon Mosholi points out in Chapter 1, MK women’s feminism was shaped by the conditions they confronted. The detailed discussion of MK women’s roles across the time frame of struggle – from the generation of Nondwe Mankahla, Ruth Mompati and Jackie Sedibe in the 1960s through to the women of the 1970s and 1980s – shows the concrete ways in which women’s presence and experiences brought to the fore the question of gender equality in MK and in the African National Congress (ANC).

Women were not fighting for themselves as individuals. Across different periods and arenas, this book shows that women joined the national liberation struggle against apartheid because they themselves felt the daily injustice of apartheid. Women’s accounts show that they did not doubt their abilities to fight for freedom. The experiences of women in MK illuminate the fact that it was the national liberation movements that needed to transform their patriarchal cultures to keep up with women’s expansive visions of substantive equality. This transformation was not easy. Indeed, as Jonna Katto shows, this book illuminates the fact that ‘women’s equality with men was gained through the liberation struggle’ (2014: 556). It matters that women were there! Women brought with them ideational, material and spatial transformation that provided the strategies and tactics for the achievement of formal gender equality in South Africa. This book shows clearly that women changed MK and the ANC.

Guerrillas and Combative Mothers has importantly moved the focus on women and the armed struggle beyond the narrow focus on MK women. While MK women rightly contest their erasure, it is also true that their experiences are more privileged and accounted for than the women combatants of Poqo, the Azanian People’s Liberation Army (APLA) and the Azanian National Liberation Army (AZANLA). By examining the role of Poqo women in the 1960s in the fight against

Bantu authorities, I have shown that women participated in the armed struggle from the outset. The experiences of Poqo women also move us away from the focus on the urban-based activists and guerrillas in South Africa. By centring their role in the Pan Africanist Congress's (PAC's) insurrections, I have shown the extent to which the PAC, a young party that was just two years old when it was banned, had a wider reach across the country. Poqo women's convictions are demonstrative of the deep Africanist feelings that led to the founding of the party in 1959, marking the first breakaway party from the ANC.

The role of Poqo women and that of urban-based combative mothers helpfully moves us away from a narrow focus on formally trained combatants as the arbiters of armed struggle participation. By detailing the role of women in rural-based insurrections and self-defence units in the 1980s, this book shows that the majority of women and girls participated in the armed struggle without military training. It makes it clear that the experiences of MK women recruits and those of exile-trained APLA recruits are the exception, not the rule. Yolande Bouka warns that 'while women serving in armed rebellions captured the world imagination . . . the emphasis on women in uniform reproduces the primacy of militarized masculinity in anticolonial struggle. It feeds into a perverse idea that soldiering, which assumes and requires masculine traits, is inextricably linked to citizenship' (2020: 10). As feminist scholars have argued, the overemphasis on trained women combatants feeds into the idea that women's achievement of equality relies on their ability to compete and out-compete men in military institutions. It distorts the actual realities of the nature of combat and political violence in most anti-colonial struggles and against apartheid. Apartheid violence was experienced and resisted in homes, schools and churches – all spaces that are historically understood to be outside of combat. The erasure of internally based women's contributions is a denial and distortion of the realities of apartheid violence, which was gendered in experience and resistance. As Mxolisi R. Mchunu's book *Violence and Solace: The Natal Civil War in Late-Apartheid South Africa* (2020) shows, to revisit these eras and arenas of apartheid violence and resistance may make it possible for us to understand the contours of current political violence, such as in KwaZulu-Natal. By detailing the accounts of experiences of Poqo

women and urban-based combative mothers, *Guerrillas and Combative Mothers* shows the broad range of the armed struggle – the actors, ideas and strategies – as a historical truth.

The book also provides the most detailed account in the literature of demobilisation and civilian reintegration of women's participation and experiences of the demobilisation process led by the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) and their daily civilian life. While most of the transnationally trained guerrillas did not see themselves as part of a future defence force, the lack of attention to gender and the dominance of the officers from the old South African Defence Force (SADF) in the integration process did not inspire them to want to join the democratic defence force. The experiences of South African women are similar to those of women in multiple contexts across the world who have 'proved' their ability to compete with men in the military, and yet find themselves marginalised in the conceptualisation and implementation of the disarmament and demobilisation process.

The women from MK who did join the SANDF pioneered gender transformation. In her article about the creation of United Nations Resolution 1325, the first resolution on women, peace and security, Cornelia Weiss shows the importance of tracing and theorising women's contributions as 'initiators, drafters and strategists' (2021). By highlighting the strategic role of women in the Portfolio Committee on Defence in the creation of a gender-friendly legislative framework and the role of women within the SANDF in the implementation, *Guerrillas and Combative Mothers* shows that it is women who champion, conceptualise, guide and oversee the implementation of gender equality in South African institutions.

The 'Ministerial Task Team Report on Sexual Harassment, Sexual Exploitation, Sexual Abuse and Sexual Offences within the Department of Defence', initiated by former minister of defence and military veterans, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula, was a response to 'complaints of sexual misconduct perpetrated by members of the defence force amongst themselves and against women in peace support operations deployment areas' (Ministerial Task Team 2020: 11). The report shows that young women recruits are especially vulnerable to sexual harassment and abuse within the SANDF. It points to a regression in the gender transformation

of the defence force and the entrenchment of toxic patriarchal cultures that pervade South African public institutions, which express their power through a complete disregard for legal and ethical prescriptions.

I hope that this book inspires a new generation of South Africans to re-examine this period of our history. A look at the reference list for this book and others in this area shows that there is a need for black researchers to revisit this period of struggle to ask new questions that might provide some answers about current struggles. For example, this period of struggle may shed new insights into the politics of state capture. If we are able to trace the histories of some ideas, individuals, organisations and relationships to earlier periods of history, it may be possible to understand the reproduction of apartheid geographies of violence, patronage and corruption that is characteristic of South Africa's current political crisis.

Unfortunately, the silence and reduction of women's contributions to a rumour almost 30 years into democracy should not be surprising. What Thandi Modise describes as 'a deliberate brushing out of women in the armed struggle' is an example of the limited scope through which women across the world can achieve substantive equality within patriarchal and neo-liberal nation states.² As Chiedza Musengezi and Irene McCartney point out in their introduction to *Women of Resilience: The Voices of Women Ex-Combatants*, in Zimbabwe, 'it is not women that need reminding that today, twenty years after independence, they are still marginalized from power. This is not what they fought to achieve' (2000: xiii). I have argued elsewhere that there are significant continuities in women's participation in wars of independence, post-independence wars of the 1980s and 1990s and current conflicts in Africa, including those that are framed within the narrow logic of the United States-led war on terrorism (see Magadla 2021b). I have argued that 'understanding continuities allows feminist scholars and activists to avoid setting up false hierarchies among various women combatants and to understand war roles as a continuum in women and girls' everyday life in Africa and in the different periods of African state making that continue to be militarized' (Magadla 2021b: 575).

2. During the colloquium "‘S’obashaya ngamatye’: Women and 60 Years of the Armed Struggle in South Africa’, held via Zoom on 9–10 August 2021.

Whether colonially imposed states remain in Africa, the experience of women in the armed struggle shows that current challenges cannot be addressed without women's participation and agitation for structural transformation. They provide an example that should inspire the generation of today and of the future to understand struggles for gender equality along a continuum of struggle. What is clear is that women do not and cannot opt out of political struggle.

Ultimately, I hope that this book provides an example of sustained intergenerational feminist research, which shows practical ways that younger generations can co-curate spaces with older generations and allow women veterans to speak freely and reflectively about their experiences, gains and enduring challenges towards the achievement of substantive equality and a better life for African women. I hope that I have succeeded in centring women's words, ideas, actions, poetry and music that all together truthfully tell aspects of women's historical contributions and provide signposts for future research. I hope that now that part of the story has been told, its seeds will 'fall and grow'.

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Ruth Mompoti in the Soviet Union in 1962. (photo: supplied by the Ngaba and Mompoti families and the Ruth Segomotsi Mompoti Foundation)



Ruth Mompoti. (photo: supplied by the Ngaba and Mompoti families and the Ruth Segomotsi Mompoti Foundation)



Nomvo Booi in Tanzania.
(photo: *Mail & Guardian*)



Major General Jackie Refiloe Sedibe, who was the highest-ranked woman in uMkhonto we Sizwe and became the highest-ranked woman in the SANDF. (photo: *South African Soldier Magazine*)



Pumza Dyantyi (MK name, Alice Tsongo). She was a member of parliament for the ANC from 2019 to 2021. She previously served as MEC of Health from 2014 to 2018 and MEC of Social Development from 2018 to 2019 in the Eastern Cape. (photo: ANC Eastern Cape)



Nondwe Mankahla. (photo: Fredlin Adriaan/*The Herald*)



Naomi Ribbon Mosholi
(MK name, Susan Lamu).
(photo: supplied)



Sankie Mthembi-Mahanyele
(MK name, Rebecca Matlou).
(photo: supplied)



Colonel Belinda Martin (MK
name, Gloria Mtungwa) with
then South African First Lady
Zanele Mbeki. (photo: *South
African Soldier Magazine*)



Thenjiwe Mtintso (right) with her mother and
sister in 1976, following her release from
detention. (photo: supplied)



Thenjiwe Mtintso (MK name,
Molly) in Uganda in 1991,
where she served as the ANC's
chief representative and regional
MK commander from 1985 to
1992. (photo: supplied)



On 14 October 2022, Rhodes University awarded Thenjiwe Mtintso with a Doctor of Laws (LLD) (*honoris causa*) in recognition and celebration of her contributions as a freedom fighter and as a gender activist. She is pictured with a long-time friend and fellow Black Consciousness activist, Professor Barney Pityana. (Photo: Velisile Bukula)



Dipuo Mvelase (MK name, Minah Motau). (photo: Umkhonto weSizwe National Council)



Nomfundiso Kulati (MK name, Thabisa Skhulu). (photo: supplied)



Makhosazana Xaba (MK name, Nomgqibelo) in 1984, pretending to be having a picnic while receiving training on how to operate in the ANC underground. (photo: supplied)



Makhosazana Xaba and fellow students at the Werner-Lambertz International College of Journalism in 1988, visiting a small town south of Berlin, Germany, to see how and where newspapers were printed. (photo: supplied)



On 6 April 2022, Rhodes University awarded Makhosazana Xaba with a Doctor of Laws (LLD) (*honoris causa*) for her contribution to the anti-apartheid struggle, literature and women's health in South Africa. (photo: Foto First, Makhanda)



Totsie Memela. (photo: supplied)



Twin sisters in the armed struggle: Major General Ntsiki Memela-Motumi and Totsie Memela. (photo: supplied)

Major General Ntsiki Memela-Motumi,
former Chief Director: Transformation
Management of the SANDF. (photo: *South
African Soldier Magazine*)



Mpoetsi Morake (MK name, Ruth
Mantile), March 2019. (photo:
Siphokazi Magadla)



Phumla Williams.
(photo: Government
Communication and
Information System)



A newspaper story on Thandi Modise, 30 March 1989. (photo: *Weekly Mail*)



Ntombizodwa Zondo (AZANLA combat name, Mbali Ngwenya) at the Dukwi refugee camp in Botswana in 1985, where she received military and political training. (photo: supplied)



Ntombizodwa Zondo with AZANLA ex-combatant Kukie Thlaku at the Dukwi refugee camp in 1985. (photo: supplied)



Brenda Badela (MK name, Thoko Matthews). (photo: supplied)



Ntombizodwa Zondo. (photo: supplied)



Lindiwe Zulu. (photo: <https://www.gov.za/>)



Ayanda Dlodlo. (photo: <https://www.gov.za/>)